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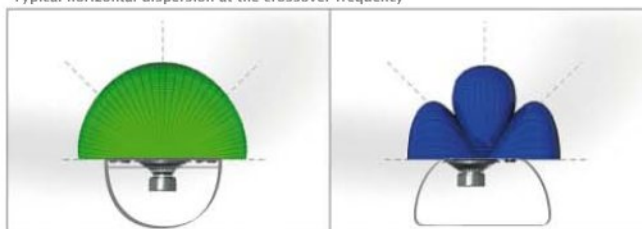
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WELCOME

It's been said many times, but it's still a truism: in the home cinema arena, big is always better. If you want to recreate a genuine cinematic experience, you can't beat a huge screen coupled to larger-than-life sound.



So to help you get that bigger picture, we're going unashamedly over the top. This issue we audition one of the biggest-sounding speakers on the planet, the TAD Reference One, and meet some

of the dedicated, talented people who make it. We also **exclusively review Panasonic's stunning 65in Freesat TV**, audition gigantic speaker systems from

Paradigm and KEF, and go super-large with high-end projectors from Cineversum and Sony. If you've picked us up because you're looking for advice on new kit, I urge you to pause... and think bigger. You won't regret it.

And, as many of us amass ever larger collections of music and video on our PCs, we look at the growing number of software packages that can make browsing this media on your bigscreen fun and intuitive.

Enjoy the show!

Steve May

TEAM HCC

Steve May:
The UK's most experienced AV Editor with 20+ years as a CE journo on his clock



Anton van Beek:
News Ed Anton began his pro-videophile career over a decade ago



Mark Craven:
HCC's Production Editor can write shorthand – he can't read it, though



Rik Henderson:
HCC's Dep Ed is an AV and videogames nut – and former TV presenter



Chris Jenkins:
Our ISF-calibrated Tech Labs manager is the former Editor of *Total DVD* mag



John Rook:
Art Editor John first worked on HCC back in 1999, when TVs were made of wood



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TECH LABS**
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begins on
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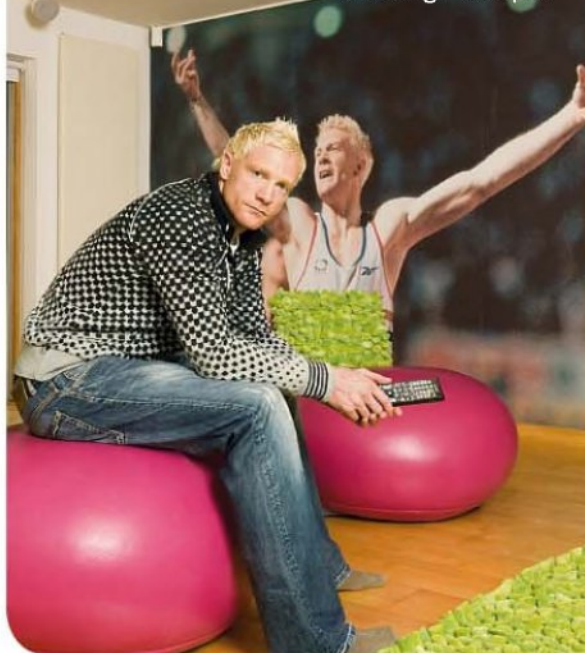
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XBMC Media Center (Xbox version)

Boxee

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Equipment reviewed in Home Cinema Choice is measured and quantified by Future Tech Labs, which for more than 15 years has set the standard for independent AV test & measurement. The findings of the Tech Labs are used to underpin the subjective opinions of our Reviews team, ensuring that you receive the best-possible advice when it comes to planning your next purchase



CO-STARRING

This issue's team of expert writers are the best qualified in the business

Adam Rayner:

The UK's foremost expert in extreme audio writes about bass, hi-fi and cartoons



Richard Stevenson:

Industry veteran and former Editor of UK CE trade journal ERT



Danny Philips:

Former Editor of *What Video* & *High-Definition TV* and dedicated AV boffin



Jim Hill:

Apple fanatic Hill is the former editor of *T3 Home* and a *What Hi-Fi* escapee



Jon Thompson:

Post-production specialist whose credits include *Casino Royale* and *Kill Bill*



John Archer:

The UK's most experienced TV tester cut his teeth as an early HCC staffer



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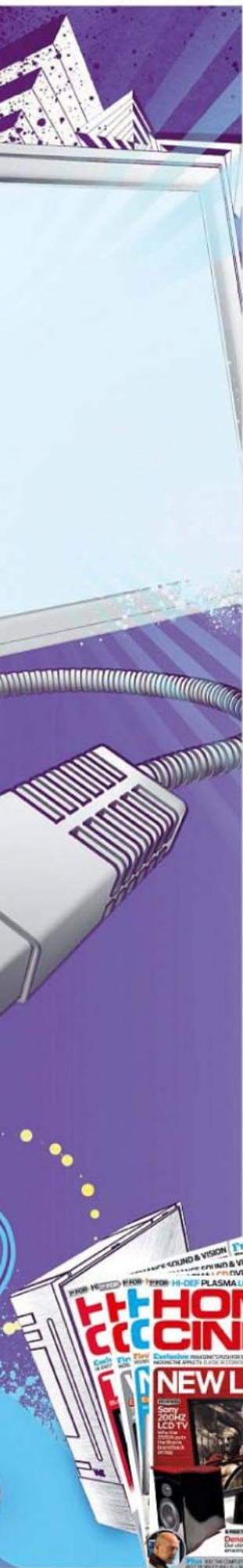
For comments on tech developments, system problems, or plain old moaning, there's no better venue!

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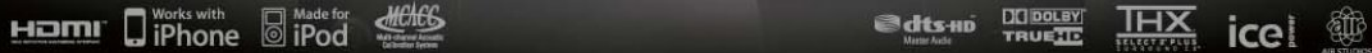
We discover Sony's best-kept secret...





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BULLETIN

→ **News highlights** JVC GOES LARGE Trio of new HD projectors announced
WIZARD OF OZ Warner preps classic for HD release SUPER SUBS Tannoy revamps bass box lineup
SONY TAKES TOP SPOT Blu-ray pioneer king of Europe sales TRANSFORMERS: REVENGE OF
THE FALLEN Bot-tastic Blu-ray on the way DEMO'D One-stop guide to the best bits of *Watchmen*

Inglourious soundbarsterd

Teufel Cinebar 50 → www.teufel.eu/uk

The German audio wizards at Teufel have added an all-in-one soundbar solution to the brand's lineup of direct-sales loudspeaker systems. Teufel proclaims the Cinebar 50 will 'catapult the otherwise flimsy sound from new modern flatscreen TVs to a higher level'. The £630 system, which doesn't require the use of wall reflections for its spatial sound processing, comprises a 200W soundbar (featuring six drivers) and 150W CB 50 SW subwoofer.



HCC Online...

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Gigantor!

Onkyo TX-NR5007 Network AVR
www.onkyo.co.uk

Onkyo is the first AV specialist to offer a 9.2-channel receiver with Audyssey DSX decoding, which gives you the option of installing additional front height/width speakers for even more immersive audio. That's just one killer attribute of the new 220W-per-channel TX-NR5007. Priced around £2,400, this THX Ultra2 Plus-certified beast also has impressive connectivity, including eight HDMI inputs with two outputs; DLNA networking with extensive audio file support; and 1080p video upscaling via a Silicon Optix HQV Reon VX video processor.

Partner with...

Wharfdale Diamond 10 Series
Affordable hi-fi speakers
£130-£680 approx



Wharfdale has expanded its Diamond speaker line-up with the addition of two new standmount models, five floorstanders, three centres, two dedicated surround speakers and three active subwoofers. Prices range from £130 per-pair for the Diamond 10.0 standmounts up to £680 for a brace of the 10.7 floorstanders. Tasty.
www.wharfdale.co.uk



Compact power



Developed to address 'the demand for powerful, accurate and tuneful bass from a compact and

discrete enclosure', Tannoy's new TS-Series active subwoofer range promises to be the brand's most flexible and formidable to date. The line-up consists of the 200W TS-801 (£400), 300W TS-1001 (£500) and the 500W TS-1201 (£600). The most obvious upgrades over previous Tannoy subs include the addition of speaker-level inputs, chunkier cabinets with profiled edges and a top-mount control panel with LCD display.

Budget Full HD projection



Projection specialist Vivitek is pushing down the price of bigscreen HD in the UK with a new 1080p

DLP model that costs just £850. The company claims its cut-price H1080FD has a contrast ratio of 4,000:1 and 1,800 ANSI Lumens of brightness. Connectivity on the credit-crunch model is also good, including twin HDMI inputs and a 12V trigger for automated screen control. 'A portable and economical package that gives consumers HD content without compromises,' is the brand's claim.

OLED delay?



Is Sony putting OLED on the back burner? That may well be the case, if you believe a report in the *Wall*

Street Journal that claimed Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Howard Stringer thinks the mega-brand can ill-afford to continue to develop OLED for the mass market, and is refocusing his efforts on LCD technology.

Sony was widely expected to launch a larger screen OLED model this year. However production yield remains low and the recession continues to drive TV buyers toward the budget end of the market.

Playlist...

Team *HCC* reveals its Playback picks of the last month

1 Tarantino takes over Sky Movies (Sky)



Sky's gambit of getting QT to pick and discuss his favourite modern movies bordered on genius. Insightful and unmissable. Pay attention Ross and Kermode, this guy has raised the bar. *Steve May*

2 The Damned United (Region B BD)



I'm a big fan of the book, and while it's slightly different in tone (not as damning, ironically) this biopic of Brian Clough is still fascinating. *Rik Henderson*

3 The International (All-region BD)



Talky, European-flavoured thriller makes a refreshing change from the Hollywood norm. *Mark Craven*

4 The Middleman (R1 DVD)



Cruelly cut down in its prime, this quirky cult series is now available on DVD in the US. Woo-hoo! *Anton van Beek*

5 Afro Samurai: Resurrection (R2 DVD)

Sublime animation, a crazy story, and cool haircuts. What more does a dude need? *John Rook*

JVC unveils new D-ILA PJs

3D and 4K2K models should follow in the future

JVC has updated its D-ILA projector range with two new models: the DLA-HD550 (£4,000 approx) and the high-end THX-approved HD950 (£6,000). And, having spent some hands-on time with the latter, we're left wondering if the brand has left any wriggle-room for its rivals.

New on the 950 is Clear Motion Drive (CMD), a frame rate accelerator that works with the HQV Reon-VX picture processor from Silicon Optix. CMD is designed 'for watching 1080i sources such as Sky Sports, as well as SD content from DVD,' according to product manager Steven Carter, and has no effect on 1080p24 source material.

To test its effectiveness, *HCC* watched a clip from *Armageddon*, involving the destruction of a satellite in orbit. It's a tough scene for any projector, but the 950 made it look so impressive that it was hard to believe it was upscaled SD content. Blacks looked great without compromising shadow detail, there was no smearing, and detail pinged. Meanwhile, those with large NTSC DVD collections will appreciate the Inverse Telecine mode, which grabs encoded video from NTSC discs at 24fps and displays it at 48fps. The result is a deliciously smooth output with no 2-3 pulldown judder.

Naturally, the D-ILA astounds with HD sources. *The Dark Knight's* Batpod chase is a perfect

showcase; shot at night, but with frequent peak whites and fast-moving action, it looked sensational. By way of contrast, the opening hijack from *Fast & Furious* unspools in bright daylight, but again the depth and solidity of the 950's imagery was breathtaking.



A JVC 4K projector will come eventually, believes the brand's product manager Steven Carter

The cheaper DLA-HD550 shares many of its bigger brother's attributes, including

CMD, Inverse Telecine, motorized lens cover and auto screen adjustment. It does, however, miss out on the THX certification and preset, ISF calibration and advanced colour management. More frustrating is the loss of the 12V trigger, which rules the PJ out completely for those looking to upgrade an existing install that uses screen automation.

Top secret

JVC also has a third new projector due later this year – the £10,000 DLA-HD990 – but the only information the surprisingly tight-lipped product manager would reveal was the promise of a 70,000:1 native contrast ratio.

What about a 4K2K model? 'It will probably come. The question is when,' admitted Carter. 'The catch currently is the video processor – currently Meridian takes one of our D-ILA models and matches it to a processor able to

upscale to Digital Cinema standards, but that level of electronics is very expensive. It all depends on when more affordable processing becomes available.'

Additionally, while there's no official word, a source close to JVC told *HCC* that an innovative 3D projector is planned for 2010. >

JVC's DLA-HD950 projector features THX certification



Demo'd!

The AV highlights of...
Watchmen: Director's Cut on Blu-ray

Blue giant



41.29: Doctor Manhattan's Vietnam flashback shows the impressive colour saturation and clarity of the VC-1 encode. The orange sky and icy blue glow of his body are remarkably stable, while the fine detailing picks out every piece of exploding body.

Burn it down



118.30: The DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix kicks up a notch as Nite Owl and Sally Jupiter rescue those trapped in a burning tenement building. You feel every gun blast, burst of flame and collapsing floor as it happens on screen.

I predict a riot



127.17: The sound design excels again during the prison riot. The surrounds immerse you in the heart of the action, while Night Owl and Sally Jupiter's fight with a group of inmates is accompanied by clinically precise thuds and cracks.

Apocalypse wow



162.05: The disc's astonishing HD visuals and lossless audio come together during the film's cataclysmic finale. Crank the volume up and your neighbours will think that an alien squid is destroying your living room!

BD doc is a howling success

Why *American Werewolf... 'Making of'* flick is a labour of love

Two years ago film journalist Paul Davis took his love of *An American Werewolf in London* to a whole new level. Having just completed a retrospective feature on the classic horror for a US film magazine, Davis realised there had never been a proper documentary made about the groundbreaking werewolf flick, and decided to make one himself. The resulting doc now features on the film's new Blu-ray release.

'I have always loved really in-depth, well-made documentaries about movies,' the 28-year-old told *HCC*, 'but nothing has been done on *An American Werewolf in London*, which is definitely as deserving as some movies out there that do have these docs.' So, with the help of friends and another young filmmaker, Davis started planning his film, entitled *Beware the Moon: Remembering An American Werewolf in London*, and getting in contact with people involved in the 1981 horror for their cooperation.

One of the first to respond was director John Landis. The Hollywood legend, while flattered, had only one question: what did Davis expect to do



UK-based filmmaker Paul Davis now has plans to make horror films

with it? Davis explains: 'We didn't have the

rights to do anything with the film, because it's owned by Universal'.

Landis put the documentary maker in touch with Universal, who initially turned him down flat. Undeterred, Davis and crew continued (they already had some interviews scheduled), and put together a showreel that they presented to the *American Werewolf... director*. 'From that moment he was committed to project,' says Davis, 'He basically guided it over the finish line... practically bullied Universal into releasing this thing, telling them that it would be ridiculous for them to turn it down. In the end it was like a swap. Universal said they wouldn't charge us for the footage and the music we were using if we gave them the documentary. Which made us very happy. It's *An American Werewolf in London* on Blu-ray – what better place for it to be? We're absolutely ecstatic'.

While Davis remains slightly downbeat about not being able to track down *American Werewolf's* fabled deleted scenes for his documentary, ('I tried... there's nothing left,' he says) this is made up for by the interviews he secured with most of the main cast and crew, and some rare behind-the-scenes footage of Rick Baker's startling SFX.

So with *Beware the Moon* completed and now released, what's next for Davis? 'I want to get into feature films. My passion is horror movies and I've got plenty of ideas I can actually work with. I've started writing my first screenplay, so I'm excited to kind of go in that direction'.

See p103 for our review of Universal's Blu-ray release

Director John Landis helped get the *Making of...* doc included on the new *AAWIL* release



Wizard of BD



We're off to see the wizard... in wonderful 1080p! On November 2 Warner Home Video is releasing the

Hollywood classic *The Wizard of Oz* as a 70th Anniversary Collector's Edition Blu-ray in the UK. The studio has financed a full remaster of the film, scanning each of the Technicolor camera negatives at 8K, before creating the new 4K 'capture master' that was used to create the Blu-ray edition. An exhaustive collection of extras has also been licenced, including rare archival test footage and outtakes.

Bose system



Loewe has released an entry-level audio system designed to match its existing BluTech Vision BD

decks and ViewVision DVD recorders. Priced at £625, the sleek and minimalist AudioVision includes a CD/DVD player (with 1080p upscaling), onboard 5.1 decoder with analogue output, and an FM radio with RDS. MP3 formats are supported, and the system comes with an iPod cable/docking station to facilitate convenient music playback. The AudioVision is available in a choice of chrome silver or black finishes.

Slim sound



'Décor conscious home theatre,' is the catchphrase at JVC these days when it comes to three

additions to its range of home cinema sound systems: the TH-BA1 soundbar; the TH-FT3 front surround system with two slim-line wall-hanging flatpanel speakers; and the TH-B57 soundbar, which the company claims is currently the slimmest available. The latter two ship with a flatpanel amplifier. All three models feature a wireless 100W subwoofer. Prices were unavailable at the time of going to press.



Smokin' hot?

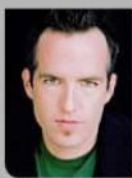
Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen → Paramount Home Entertainment → R2 DVD & All-region Blu-ray

Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen, 2009's loudest and most successful blockbuster, will be stomping home on Nov 30. Our spybots tell us that three DVD incarnations (single-disc, double-disc and a *Transformers* 1 & 2 combo-pack) and two HD versions (a three-disc BD with

Digital Copy and a combo pack of the two *Transformers* flicks), will be battling it out for your affections. Extras include a Michael Bay chat track, *Making of...* doc, numerous featurettes and doubtless some dull, interactive stuff. Frankly, we just want it for Megan Fox...

Pick'n'mix

Filmmaker
Kyle Rankin
picks his five
fave films
and TV
shows



1 The Big Lebowski

I laughed myself sick in the theatre. It's near perfect. We all have a little Lebowski in us.

2 Groundhog Day

A hilarious, deep film. Fantastically executed with an amazing performance from Bill Murray.

3 The Road Warrior

An extremely effective, post-apocalyptic, balls-to-the-wall, action fun-fest.

4 8 1/2

Fellini's masterpiece explains what it feels like to be a man. Without explaining anything.

5 Sideways

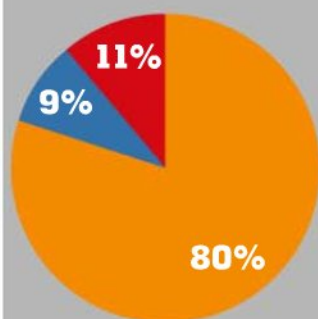
There's something very important about this film and what it says... but mostly it's hugely entertaining.

Kyle Rankin's *Infestation* is released on Blu-ray and DVD by Icon Entertainment on September 7. Check out our review on page 97. Rankin's credits include Ben Affleck and Matt Damon's *Project Greenlight*, and *The Battle of Shaker Heights* starring Shia LaBeouf.

We asked...

In the wake of the RealNetworks DVD copying case, should DVD ripping be made legal?

- Absolutely. Fair-use ripping hurts no one
- No way. DVD ripping opens the door to commercial piracy
- Who cares? It's easier to download what I want



Results from www.homecinemachoice.com
Go online for more polling action

Sony leads with new BD tech

Latest players deliver improvements in picture quality

While Sony has yet to commit to a BD recorder for the UK (if it doesn't jump with a Freesat model, buyers will have to wait for a Freeview HD-enabled unit to arrive), it currently offers Japanese buyers an entire range of mouth-watering HD recording tech. At an exclusive briefing at its Tokyo HQ, Sony gave HCC an overview of its latest Blu-ray player and a run-through of its BD recorder range.

'In Japan, we have four types of recorder,' we were told. 'Each one represents a concept. The X-series recorders are aimed at home theatre enthusiasts, and offer the highest possible sound and vision quality; the L-Series is aimed at digital camera owners and video makers, with tools they would find useful; the T-Series is targeted at heavy TV time-shifters; and the A-Series is for those that want to migrate content to their portable devices.'

A demo of content transferring to a PSP certainly impressed. Broadcast content is recorded to the hard disk, and then a one-touch transfer button converts material to the PSP at high-speed. A one-hour TV show can be dubbed to the handheld device in just two minutes!

Similar ease of use extends to the brand's L-Series models. When a camcorder is hooked up to the BD deck by USB cable, the GUI gives you the option of copying via a single button push. The recorder and camcorder sync and the footage is dubbed automatically to hard disk. Digital camera fans can similarly benefit from an X-Pict Story mode, which allows users to select background music and then automatically authors a slideshow. The entire presentation can then be copied to disc.

Colour enhancer

In the dedicated Blu-ray player market, Sony finally appears to be up to speed after a slow start. When we visited, the brand had the top player slot in the UK, France and Germany, according to GFK sales data.

The BD player that finally turned the market around for the brand was the best-selling BDP-S350. That models' replacement, the BDP-S360, is now available in the UK. Going forward, Sony's engineers believe innovations in picture processing are key: specifically the so-called HD Reality Enhancer with Super Bit Mapping that was introduced on the high-end BDP-S5000ES, but is now also available on the new £400 BDP-S760.



DIY Blu: Sony's Japanese Blu-ray recorders offer one-touch easy dubbing for cam users

'The most important aspect of this technology is that we can enhance data from the original 8bit data on the disc to 14bit. This means more picture detail and smoother colour gradations than rival players,' says Sony.

For instance, the acclaimed BDP-S5000ES player can output the extrapolated image data via a Deep Colour link to 10bit-compatible displays, but (significantly) can also improve the picture on older 8bit displays that lack Deep Color connectivity. Indeed, Sony's engineers believe that the picture from the BDP-S5000ES, when sent to an 8bit display (interpolated to a 14bit colour palette from the 8bit original and then scaled back again) will be superior to another brand's player outputting to a current high-end 10- or 12bit TV screen.

A demo reel of HD footage shot in Kyoto certainly revealed extra clarity from the disc when the HD Reality Enhancer was engaged. Cleverly, detail only appeared where you would imagine extra information could lurk. Sky detail was left alone, while building textures received a boost. A good deal smarter than the average edge enhancer, Sony's tech makes its judgement by analysing the picture pixel by pixel. The silicon also resists the temptation to over-stress skin tones, ensuring people remain believable.

'The S760 is our most affordable high-performance BD player to date. It offers the same picture technology as the ES model, plus 7.1 analogue inputs and wi-fi,' Sony's product specialist Eric Kingdon told HCC. 'The S760 will be joined by the £300 BDP-S560, which also has wi-fi, but lacks the AV embellishments.'

BD bargain: Sony's BDP-S760 offers high-end AV performance at a mid-range price



This month's top ten news stories in handy, bite-sized chunks...

1 Heroes tops download poll

The popular superhero soap opera has been awarded a brand new accolade, that of being the most file-shared TV series on the 'net. A poll conducted by research firm Big Champagne shows that around 55million people downloaded episodes of *Heroes* in the last 12 months while *Lost* could only manage 51million.



Heroes: internet favourite

battery in the lappo overheated, because of the lack of ventilation, and set fire to the sofa. So consider yourself warned.

6 Arrgh! Pirate booty seized

Sweden's Anti-Piracy Bureau recently raided the home of a 33-year old alleged pirate and discovered what may be the largest haul of illegal movies ever found in Europe. The accused's 88TB computer server contained around 10,000 movies, of which he denies any knowledge.

2 Tosh hearts BD

Toshiba has finally jumped into bed with Blu-ray. Some 18 months after the company pulled the plug on HD DVD, the Japanese giant has revealed its first Blu-ray player, the BDX2000 (on sale late November for £250) and a new high-end laptop with BD drive, the Satellite P500. A range of recorders is expected to be announced for the Japanese market, too.

3 Hollywood loves DivX

Film Fresh has become the first download-to-own retailer to offer Hollywood films in the DivX format, albeit with fairly tight DRM. Lionsgate, Paramount, Sony Pictures and Warner Bros have provided a catalogue of 600 new and recent films that the US site makes available as standard-definition 'download-to-burn' DivX files for between \$10-15. These can then be watched on your computer or any DivX-certified device.

4 Pioneer an AV maniac

Pioneer is to return to its AV roots, and may even resurrect the Kuro branding, according to the company's US executive VP Russ Johnston. The Pioneer bigwig claims the company will embrace a core philosophy 'focused on engineering excellence and a maniacal commitment to create the best-possible home-theatre experiences.' It is also 'studying the best usage of the Kuro brand for the future... because it has come to mean more than just the best display in the industry'. We say, let it go...

5 Flaming heck

A laptop left on a sofa has been blamed for the fire that killed a man in Vancouver earlier this year. According to the Coroners Service of British Columbia, the blaze began when the lithium-ion

News x10

8 Next-gen EPGs

Samsung has signed a licensing deal with Rovi for its advanced EPG technology. The AV giant will use Rovi's tech in its next-gen TVs, which it claims will 'empower consumers to find their favourite content on the television while also enabling them to discover new programming quickly and easily.' Much like the TV guide in your Sunday paper.

9 BDA plans 3D BD future

The Blu-ray Disc Association has confirmed plans to incorporate 3D into the format at the recent IFA tech show. '[BD] will set the standard for 3D home viewing in the future,' soothsayed a BDA suit, before talking about 'a uniform specification to ensure consistent delivery of 3D content across the Blu-ray platform'.

Sony TV: Or is it an oven door?



10 Oven door TV

Yet another chap has been arrested in the US for trying to sell an oven door disguised as an HDTV. This offender put a bit of effort into it, wrapping the door in plastic and covering it with convincing-looking Sony and Best Buy stickers.

Premiere

HCC's guide to what's happening in the world of TV and films...

Back to Galactica



A little bird has told us that Bryan Singer is in talks with Universal to bring a brand-new update of the cult '70s TV series *Battlestar Galactica* to the big screen. Are none of the people involved aware of the sensational TV re-imagining that finished its run earlier this year?

Small screen scares

Clive Barker fans rejoice: American network ABC has requested a pilot for a potential series called *Clive Barker's Hotel*. The series will apparently centre on a series of ghoulish incidents at a haunted hotel.

CG Blue Meanies

Among the numerous remakes coming our way is a motion-captured CG version of *The Yellow Submarine*. It'll be produced by Disney, directed by Robert Zemeckis, and hated by everyone.

Teen wolf

Twilight-helmer Catherine Hardwicke is sticking with the world of supernatural romance – she's reportedly signed on to direct the werewolf flick *The Girl with the Red Riding Hood* – a gothic re-imagining of *Little Red Riding Hood* with a teen love-triangle at its centre.

Bourne, again



It now seems certain that former special agent Jason Bourne will be heading back to cinemas in the near future, following the news that Universal has hired Josh Zetumer (who has also scripted a new *Dune* movie) to pen the plot for a fourth *Bourne*... flick.



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POINT OF VIEW

Richard Stevenson reckons an Apple-developed flatscreen could be more than just a pretty face. Has he lost his marbles?

I'm not 'Mac' man at all. In fact, I use a PC and feel that having an Apple logo on the lid of your laptop is actually just a big sign saying 'I'm an insecure herd-following badge snob'. But that's not to say the company from Cupertino hasn't come up with some innovative new ways of doing things. And I believe another one is just around the corner.

The US brand has already been incredibly successful at completely capturing markets from long-established players. The Macbook has virtually cleaned up in the high-end laptop business that IBM created, and the iPod took Sony's 20-year old Walkman concept, shook it up a bit, and made Apple number one in personal audio hardware – from nowhere. And then there is the mobile phone market, which is now ruled by the almighty iPhone – in my opinion the most life-changing piece of kit since Sky+. Now analysts in the US are predicting that Apple is likely to enter the home TV market, probably in 2011. So watch out Sony, Panasonic, Philips *et al*, Apple is about to steal your core business right out from under your corporate noses.

Not just a load of app

Why am I so sure? Well firstly, the army of badge snobs will buy an Apple TV just because it's, y'know, an Apple – even if it is twice the price, half the resolution and only offers a tenth of the features of traditional manufacturers' models. Just like Mac computers, in fact.

But the most compelling hint at Apple's potential rise to greatness in home cinema comes from the iPhone – or rather the open source concept of the iPhone. In case you didn't know, anyone can develop an application for the iPhone using easily obtainable and well-documented guidelines. You then simply get it approved by Apple for placement on iTunes – which, judging from some of the dross apps that have got through, can't be difficult.

This allows the iPhone to become the most flexible touchscreen universal remote available. AV hardware makers could supply a very basic remote control, or even none at all, and offer a free control interface download to your iPhone/iTouch. I have already used a BD player that offers an iPhone app rather than a traditional remote, and I'm certain this is how Apple will sell its TVs.

Moreover, while all of today's BD players, amps, processors and displays are software-driven, very few manufacturers have truly exploited this. Virtually every AVR I have tested in the last decade has been capable of firmware updates but very few manufactures go beyond the odd bug fix. And even if they do, the updates/upgrades are universal – everyone gets the same thing.

Apple's TVs will be different, offering truly customisable features, applications and content. Like the iPhone, no two devices are ever likely to be the same 24 hours after purchase, as users download the features that they want rather than what the manufacturer offers as standard. Customisable GUIs for every AV device in your system? Easy. Real-time Apps (stocks, eBay, news, RSS feeds etc) running in PiP windows? Easy peasy. Simplified one-touch DVR recording with a wide selection of interfaces? Easy peasy, lemon squeeze. Your home cinema system's features will no longer be the product of just a few bods in an R&D department. They will be your personal choice of features and functionality selected from a cornucopia of ingenious apps.

On top of all that, Apple's screens will no doubt benefit from direct access to AppleTV/iTunes content, have stunning good looks and a herd-friendly luminous Apple logo on the front. Frankly if they don't take the market by storm and knock all the big-brand TV makers into a cocked hat within just a few years, I will eat my DVD collection ●

For more of Richard Stevenson's ramblings log on to www.homecinemachoice.com/points_of_view

Tickets to see **Richard Stevenson** eat his extensive DVD collection will be shortly be going on sale at all good retailers



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DVD ADDICT

The Beek argues that James Cameron's 3D hypocalypse *Avatar* is the cinematic equivalent of the Emperor's New Clothes

You may not have quite realised it yet, but humanity finds itself on the brink of a new form of cinematic entertainment. Quite simply, the act of going to the flicks and sitting down to watch a movie will never be the same again after December 18, when James Cameron's sci-fi adventure *Avatar* opens at UK cinemas. Some ten years in the making, the self-confessed King of the World's latest \$200million blockbuster will change the way that we perceive and enjoy bigscreen entertainment. With the filmmakers, 20th Century Fox's PR department and internet fanboys already calling it 'groundbreaking', 'revolutionary', 'game-changing' and 'the future of cinema' there can be no doubt that we are all about to witness what must surely be the most important milestone in the history of film since the introduction of popcorn.

At least, that's what we're supposed to think. Having recently had the chance to attend an IMAX preview of 15 minutes of footage from *Avatar*, I'm struggling to see how it could possibly live up to any of those claims...

Battlefield Smurf

Nothing I saw on the BFI's über-screen convinced me that *Avatar* was anything more than another 3D film, and not a particularly exciting or original one at that. On the other hand, I will admit to being surprised that the next evolution in cinema is to arrive in the form of a sci-fi version of *Dances with Wolves* starring eight-foot-tall Smurfs.

Anyway, I'm not here to talk about the film itself – the hackneyed and unoriginal scenes I saw were all taken out of context, and could possibly prove much less laughable when returned to their rightful slot in the narrative – I'm here to refute the claims that *Avatar* uses 3D in exciting new ways to create a new form of immersive

entertainment. Because, going by the preview footage, there's nothing here that hasn't been done before. It's the same old story of increased depth to the image (despite the fact that the characters and props feel 2D within a 3D frame – kind of like the old parallax scrolling effect you'd get in Amiga computer games), and things poking out of the screen at you. The only difference here appears to be that Cameron continues shooting 3D material like he would 2D, resulting in fast cuts and quick camera movements that don't even give your eyes chance to focus on the extra-dimensional effects.

And while **3D technology has improved in leaps and bounds since Hollywood's first major push in the 1950s**, the imagery still lacks sharpness.

Avatar's footage is slightly blurred as it fools your eyes into believing it is three-dimensional. Given the kind of sumptuous, pin-sharp HD visuals I regularly gorge myself on courtesy of my home cinema setup, this lack of definition isn't what I want when I pay big bucks to go to the movies.

To be blunt, there was nothing about the IMAX preview that made me think I have to catch *Avatar* in 3D when it opens at cinemas. Indeed, given the image softness, I'm more likely to see it as a regular 2D presentation.

So *Avatar* isn't a revolution; it's the same old tired 3D nonsense that Hollywood has been peddling for decades. Studios are desperate for 3D to succeed because it will combat piracy and make going to the cinema more of an event, allowing them to continue to hike ticket prices. None of that has anything to do with developing the art of film – no matter what the likes of James Cameron or Peter Jackson might say.

For more wit and wisdom from *The Beek* go to www.homecinemachoice.com/dvd_addict

Anton van Beek doesn't want to have to wear 3D glasses to enjoy Hollywood blockbusters. Is that too much to ask?



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DEEP FOCUS

Hollywood insider **Jon Thompson** explains why all roads lead to *Avatar*, and predicts a massive studio deluge of 3D

As my colleague The Beek has already mentioned on p17, one of the most anticipated movies this Christmas is James Cameron's *Avatar*. The film is important in many ways. Firstly, it strives to use 3D technology well – not just as a gimmick like many have done before. Yet perhaps more significantly, Panasonic has signed a deal with Twentieth Century Fox to use the film to promote the launch of its 3D TVs and Blu-ray players. In fact, *Avatar* will be authored at Panasonic's 3D Blu-ray facility in Hollywood, and could be out as early as Easter 2010. We just have to hope that Panasonic will be ready by January's Consumer Electronics Show with both players and screens that can show 3D (quite a stretch as the final spec isn't expected until December).

The Blu-ray Disc Association's recent IFA pledge to find 'a uniform specification to ensure consistent delivery of 3D content across the Blu-ray platform' has thankfully dampened down talk of a format war. At IFA, Panasonic's senior brass were triumphant. 'We will be the first with Full HD 3D,' declared Mamoru Yohshida, at the brand's press briefing. 'The BDA is adopting our Full HD 3D concept. We are not just device-manufacturers – we strongly believe in creating a synergy between 3D content and 3D products. We have put all our research and development into 3D.' Sony also promised a full range of 3D kit for 2010, with CEO Howard Stringer announcing that the Japanese giant was fully behind the BDA's 3D plans: 'Today 3D is clearly on its way to the mass-market, and as with high-definition a few years back, there are a variety of issues yet to be addressed. But the 3D train is on the track and we at Sony are ready to drive it home!' he declared.

The satellite broadcaster Sky is also talking up 3D, but unlike the 3D Blu-ray spec, it appears the Sky system will not be full 1080p. Sky broadcasts

HD at 1080i at the moment, which I must say sucks. Broadcasters do have a history of wasting peoples' time and doing things that are not good for community at large. Sky is looking to launch its 3D service in February, and I'm sure that *Avatar* will also feature in its plans, as News Corp, which owns Sky, also owns 20th Century Fox.

A milestone in cinema

I recently chatted with John Landau, Jim Cameron's producer of many years, discovering that we both had worked for legendary producer Dino De Laurentiis in the past. John, who is very up on 3D, sees it as a milestone in cinema's history and believes it has now come of age. He also said he would like to re-release Cameron's *Titanic* in 3D, and that they have a number of other 3D projects coming down the pipe – the manga adaptation *Battle Angel* been one of them.

Now Landau has a very good point. Unlike HD, where it's fairly straightforward to make an HD version of the film from the original negative, there are not really that many 3D films out there. I think **if Sky had a season of 3D films, you could probably watch them all in just over a day or two.**

This situation will change eventually, as there is a rush at the moment to make 3D movies. Everyone I speak to has a 3D project on the go; if it was not conceived for 3D the studios are now going to make a 3D version. This has happened on a number of projects. For instance, Tim Burton's *Alice in Wonderland*, which Disney hopes will be a massive Summer blockbuster in 2010, was shot in 2D and has been 3D-ified in post-production!

Is this a passing fad? Possibly. Filmmaking is still, at the end of the day, about storytelling, 3D is a tool to aid that – not an end in itself ●

Are you crying out for digital cinema – or do you prefer to watch movies at home? Let us know: hcc@futurenet.co.uk

As a post-production expert, **Jon Thompson's** movie credits include *Casino Royale*, *Children of Men* and *Mission: Impossible 3*






Tech diary

The world of AV and film changes fast. **HCC's calendar** is here to make sure you don't miss out

Chuck: The hit US TV show returns to DVD this October



Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
				25 Surrogates Bruce Willis stars in this sci-fi murder mystery, set in a world where people stay isolated at home, and interact only through surrogate robot bodies. Opens at cinemas across the UK from today surrogatesmovie.com		
28 Observe and Report Seth Rogen plays a bi-polar mall security guard obsessed with stopping a flasher and romancing a make-up counter girl. Get your hands on this low-brow comedy when it hits DVD and BD in the UK today	29 You're nicked! London's Metropolitan Police Force was founded on this day in 1829, so why not mark the event by sitting back with Simon Pegg and Edgar Wright's hilarious <i>Hot Fuzz</i> on DVD? Or wait until Oct 12 for the Blu-ray release	30 HomePNA Summit 2009 This two-day conference in Houston, Texas, will focus on the thorny issue of distributing bandwidth-intensive IPTV applications through multizone installs www.homepnasummit.com	01 Hannibal US actor George Peppard Jr. was born on this day in 1928. Depending on your age, you'll either know him best as the love interest in <i>Breakfast at Tiffany's</i> or John 'Hannibal' Smith in TV smash <i>The A-Team</i>	02 The National Home Improvement Show Thinking of building a dedicated cinema room, but unsure what to do with it beyond the kit? Get some tips at this three-day event at London's Earl's Court www.improveyourhomeshow.co.uk		
05 Chuck: Season Two The second season of the most nerd-tastic show on TV (currently airing on Virgin 1) makes its way to DVD in the UK today. Hopefully the episode <i>Chuck vs The Third Dimension</i> will be included in its original 3D form	06 CEDIA Region 1 Business & Technology Forum This trade event held at the Hilton Leeds City Hotel will explore a variety of pro-install topics including selling and integrating 3D display devices www.cedia.co.uk		08 Happy B-day Ripley Sigourney Weaver was born on this day in 1949. That sounds like a damned good excuse (as if we needed one) to spend the day watching her kick extra-terrestrial ass in the four <i>Alien</i> movies	09 Up Pixar continues its winning run with this sensational CG 'toon about a 78-year old man on a journey to see the wilds of South America. Four months after it struck US box office gold, you can finally see it at UK cinemas today		
12 Coraline Filmmaker Henry Selick's fantastic and spooky stop-motion adaptation of Neil Gaiman's <i>Coraline</i> hits the shelves today on DVD and Blu-ray, both including 2D and anaglyph 3D versions of the flick			15 From Hell According to the postmark it bares, the notorious 'From Hell' letter written by a man claiming to be Jack the Ripper was sent on this day in 1888. Time to revisit the film of the same name starring Johnny Depp	16 Pontypool Stephen McHattie takes top-billing in this impressive low-budget psychological thriller about the staff at a local radio station who learn that a deadly virus is raging on the streets outside. At UK cinemas this Friday	17 Sound & Vision Manchester 2009 Manchester's Renaissance Hotel is home to this two-day event that gives the public a chance to meet AV manufacturers and see and hear the latest cutting-edge AV kit www.manchestershow.co.uk	18 Interbuild 2009 The UK's leading expo for the construction industry will once again be a hotbed of smart home tech, alongside more traditional building and refurbishment products, materials and equipment www.interbuild.com
19 24: Season Seven Kiefer Sutherland's Jack Bauer is back doing what he does best (saving the US President and torturing terrorists) in this latest season of the hit TV series. Catch up with Bauer's exploits on DVD and Blu-ray in the UK from today			22 HCC #175 Start saving your pennies for HCC #175. Your favourite home cinema magazine hits the stands this Thursday, packed with hardware tests, installs, features, outspoken opinions and full-on software reviews www.homecinemachoice.com			

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Adam Rayner quests to hear one of the world's rarest, largest and most acclaimed loudspeakers

Any quest for audio perfection should ultimately bring you to within listening distance of TAD loudspeakers. The brand, which since the 1970s has been a subsidiary of Pioneer, is arguably the most respected of all the sonic super-brands, but it's also the one least heard – given that a pair of Reference One floorstanders will set you back around £50K, it's perhaps not surprising that TAD (Technical Audio Devices) rarely graces the pages of the popular press.

The native habitat of the TAD speaker is typically the high-end recording studio, but over the past few years Pioneer has been craftily squeezing TAD's design expertise and sensibilities into a range of other products: its EX Series of

high-end speakers (featured in *HCC* #170) and a range of high-performance in-wall speakers for the custom theatre crowd (ditto *HCC* #172).

Time then to track down the original Big Taddies. My mission for this, *HCC*'s Big Issue, was clear: get first-hand experience of TAD's monstrous Reference Ones and report back...

Reassuringly expensive

The Reference Ones are the brainchild of Andrew Jones, Pioneer's director of speaker engineering. They hail from Japan (for more see overleaf) and use beryllium, a costly material, to make what Pioneer calls a CST or Coherent Source Transducer, which uses a 35mm tweeter dome at the centre and a 6.25in midbass cone around it.



→ Specifications

Drive Units: 2 x 10in low-frequency drivers made from tri-laminate aramid fibre/foamed acrylic; 1 x one 6.25in mid-bass with 1 x 35mm tweeter concentrically mounted in CST Coherent Source Transducer
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Dimensions: 554(w) x 1293(h) x 698(d)mm
Weight: 150kg
Connections: Two sets of knurled gold-plated binding posts



Hand made: Attention to detail on the Reference One is outstanding. Every aspect of the build is handcrafted



Rock of ages: Tony Hickmott (left) and Ray Staff (right) take a break from mastering Motörhead at AIR studios on a pair of TAD R1s

Each enclosure also features two very high-quality 10in bass drivers, crafted from a composite of woven aramid fibres and a foamed acrylic material, to form a light yet rigid piston. This can drive bass down to a port-assisted in-room level of 21Hz – which is pretty deep. The CST devices go up to 100kHz as well, so ‘full range’ takes on a new meaning: bats to blue whales?

My search for the TAD R1 eventually led me to London’s prestigious AIR Studios, which recently took delivery of a pair. Consequently, I found myself in a room with what at first glance appeared to be two grunTERS playing with a hi-fi. In actuality I had chanced upon Tony Hickmott, from Pure Pleasure Records, working with AIR Studios’ Ray Staff, a legendary mastering engineer. The duo were preparing an audiophile vinyl release of Motörhead’s classic *1916*, the early-1990s studio album from the British rockers, and now widely regarded as a genre classic.

Of course, to master a recording, you do need to be able to hear it in true reference grade conditions. This is where the TAD’s come in.



The boys may have been mastering hard metal mayhem, but they all had to take time out from Lemmy and Co. while I treated myself to a little slice of Adele. I was on a mission after all...

Big noise

The level of purity and utter beauty delivered by the Reference Ones was similar to something I had recently experienced in front of a set of room-EQ'd Steinways (see *HCC* #170) but the immediacy here was incredible. Whereas the scale of the Steinways was as big as the temple at Abu Simbel, this TAD R1 set was more... human. The illusion of having the cute and cuddly Adele sat right before me on a high stool, emoting into one of those huge valve microphones, was perfect. The room appeared to melt away. The reality is that no matter how naturally-gifted your vocal chords may be, the noise they make will be recorded no more finely than the studio's own

Monolithic:

Each TAD Reference One weighs 150kg – which is 23 stone in old money



speaker monitors can manage. No wonder these TAD R1 models are the speakers of choice for the music business aristocracy.

I listened and I yearned. Of course, Adele had to give way to the thunderous assault of Wurzel, Phil Campbell and Philthy Animal while Lemmy barked before me: 'And I marched and I fought and I bled and I died.' It was as if the band was performing live before me. T'was brilliant.

The tragedy is that so few will actually ever get to hear these Reference Ones in anger. The sound they make is a cogent argument for large-scale hi-fidelity, but sadly it comes with a frightening price tag. Their finish is absolutely exquisite, with yard-deep lustre and lines that are almost enough to make you rob your local Post Office in order to afford them.

Funny enough, when my photographer on this job was bragging later to some contacts about the kit he'd just snapped, before they knew what had been going on, one had said: 'So, not the sort of thing you'd listen to Motörhead on then, eh?'

How wrong he was. These TADs are the Ace of Spades – absolutely, unassailably, legendary ●

Legend

Steve May treks to the farmlands of Japan to see where TAD speakers come to life

The TAD R1's are made at Pioneer's remote Tohoku plant in rural Tendo, Japan. But even though speakers have been coming off the production line since 1966, virtually no media has been invited to tour the facility. Determined to learn more about Pioneer's elusive mega-speakers, *HCC* eventually secured exclusive access. Within its gates we found a small team dedicated to making these gargantuan boxes. Indeed, the speakers themselves are crafted by a mere handful of workers, some of whom been



wrapping the same voice coils and assembling the beryllium drivers for more than 20 years. 'This is a specialised job,' said Takashi Suzuki, the speaker division's GM. 'Even inside Pioneer, very few know how to make these speakers.'

Mie Suzuki, who has been assembling and testing TAD speakers since the early 1990s, explains: 'A single operator conducts the assembly of each unit one by one, from start to finish. While there is a fair amount of stress and responsibility, the job is worthwhile.' I dare say that professional sound engineers around the world would tend to agree.

Actually, the TAD production line is just a small part of the Tohoku operation. Elsewhere in the facility, speakers are produced for Pioneer's Carrozzeria in-car brand, while R&D teams scrutinize everything from OEL displays to the latest innovations in mechatronics. And somehow fittingly, the influence of the past still impacts on the brand's forward-thinking tech; close to the plant is the Tohoku Pioneer Museum of Automatic Music Instruments, an impressive, extensive collection of antique music boxes dating from the 19th century. A passion of Pioneer's founder Nozomu Matsumoto, these are masterpieces of intricate engineering – just like the TAD R1s.

makers

Mie Suzuki has been making TAD speakers for over a decade. She's part of a small team responsible for some of the world's biggest hi-fi kit



1

1. Here the voice coil – an aluminium ribbon wire insulated in alumite film – is attached to a TD-2001 high-frequency driver. The ribbon is hand-wound onto a bobbin formed from a high-polymer compound that's heat resistance up to 400°C, providing a tolerance for high-energy input levels.

2

2. After attaching the voice coil to the bobbin, any excess glue is carefully wiped away...



3

3. Here, a voice coil wire is soldered to the lead wire on a TAD TL-1603 low frequency speaker. The TL-1603 is designed to work with a maximum input of 500W.

4

4. A pure beryllium diaphragm is used to make the TD-2001 driver. It's designed to give an extremely flat frequency response with outstanding transient response and high-fidelity imaging. Here, the voice coil assembly goes through final adjustment.



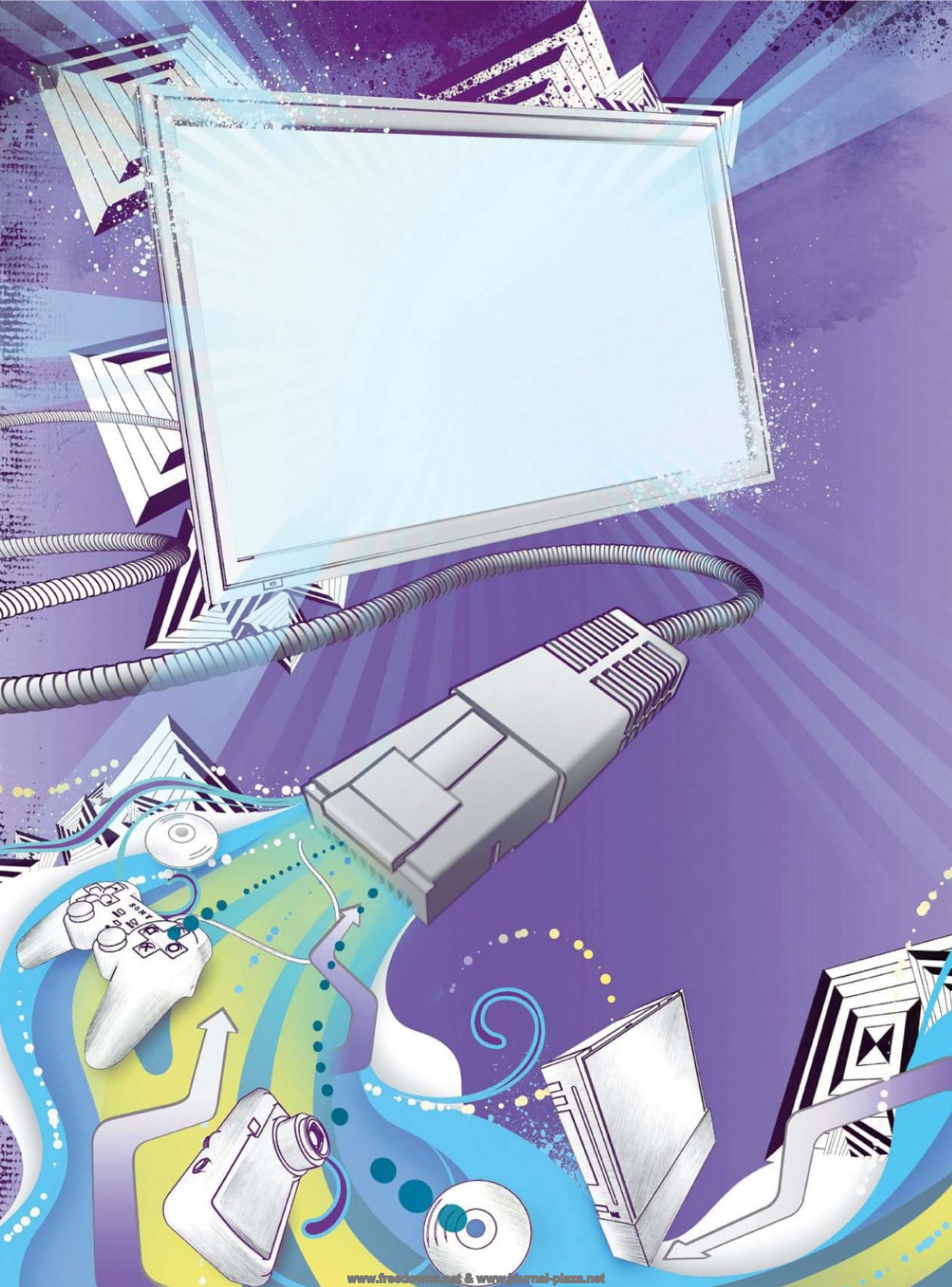
5

5. Every component in a TAD Reference One speaker has been optimised for performance, making the models a favourite of sound engineers worldwide.

6

6. A voice coil is attached to a TD-4001 rear-compression driver and cleaned. One of the world's most lauded speaker designs, it can deliver stunning audio clarity.





Set your media free!

Martin Pipe auditions six powerful AV media applications that make browsing, playing and sharing your sound and vision files a whizz

Today's home computers have oodles of AV potential. TV timeshifting, DVD/Blu-ray/ audio playback and high-performance gaming are all relatively accessible. And all PCs have access to internet radio and numerous iPlayer-type video-on-demand (VOD) services. Yet the PC is still rarely regarded as an essential bit of home cinema kit – much of its lack of impact is down to failures in general usability. The good news is that a new generation of media players and organisers are threatening to change everything.

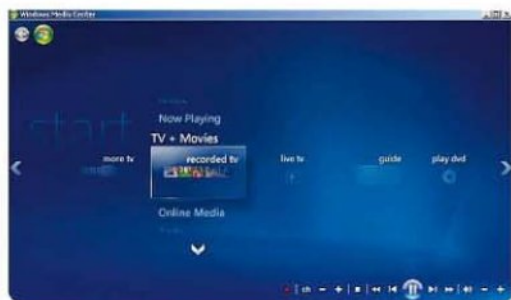
Designed to locate, organise and play nearly every file format you have, these packages effectively reinvent the role of the PC in AV. If you have a home network (wired or wi-fi) that connects PCs to games consoles, NAS

boxes and other networkable gear (including many AVRs and even TVs), then content can be streamed from one to all. In other words, your beloved pics, tunes or videos can be easily experienced in the kitchen, bedroom, lounge or anywhere else in the home.

But with so much choice, which solutions – many of them available for free – should you download first? HCC takes a look at the best (and worst) media packages currently available...>



28 SET YOUR MEDIA FREE!



Window clean: Windows Media Center features a neat, polished layout (left)



Freeview on PC: With a TV tuner, WMC can double as a full PVR



Jargon buster!

Flummoxed by PC prose – have no fear!

FTP

File Transfer Protocol. Allows you to move massive computer files via the 'net

uPnP

Universal Plug and Play. Normally, it's a pig to set up file sharing between different devices. uPnP compliance helps

SMTP

Simple Mail Transfer Protocol. Basically, the digital pixie dust that allows you to send emails

SMB

Server Message Block. A protocol that allows different software applications to access the same printers, files and stuff

OEM

Original Equipment Manufacturer. Kit that's made by one company and then re-badged by another

DRM

Digital Rights Management. Originally implemented as an anti-piracy measure, DRM is not only the bane of the illegal download community, it also hampers network sharing

DLNA

Digital Living Network Alliance. A bunch of manufacturers sat around a table and actually agreed on something for a change – DLNA-compliance

Windows Media Center

Cost: Included with £65 Home Premium Edition of Vista. £95 for XP version (if bought with hardware) from PC vendors
www.microsoft.com. Use for: Windows XP/Vista

Built into Vista Home Premium and Windows 7 (but also available as an OEM package for XP), Windows Media Center is a powerful TV and media playback tool that can handle photos, DVDs, online/networked content, AV playback and analogue/digital radio and TV. Content can be streamed over a network to a Media Center Extender, the best-known example of this being Microsoft's own Xbox 360 console – these employ the same slick and friendly GUI for media selection as WMC itself.

TV timeshifting and recording are offered – in that way, it's unique among the apps on trial here. Handy, too, that the 14-day Microsoft EPG will automatically record entire series.

Installation is wizard-driven. Up to two tuners are supported, which naturally allows you to view one channel whilst recording another. Although WMC only natively supports DTT in the UK, some digital satellite tuner cards are supplied with software 'fixes'. An alternative is to specify an external set-top box, which can be remote-controlled via a USB infra-red dongle. Many DTT tuner cards have the necessary analogue input; use S-video if at all possible.

Thanks to a polished layout, WMC is easy to use, and your files can be sensibly organised, too. Playback (which can be full-screen, with aspect ratio preserved) is of a high standard. As long as the relevant codecs (together with the freeware program Haali Media Splitter) are installed, you can view a wide variety of material. As far as using different codecs are concerned, the multi-talented 'ffdshow tryouts' is a good starting point. The only obvious weak point of WMC is that Microsoft insists on using a non-standard proprietary file format (dvr-ms) for recording – thankfully, some DVD authoring programs (such as TMPG DVD Author) can handle these, so you can convert them to more common file types.

TwonkyMedia

Cost: 30€ (Free 30-day trial can be downloaded from website)
www.twonkymedia.com
Use for: Windows XP/Vista, MacOS, Linux (server only)

Available for Windows, Mac and Linux, this commercial package consists of two main elements – TwonkyMedia Manager and TwonkyMedia Server. The first is used to organise stuff, while the second is a server that goes beyond basic uPnP/DLNA, while retaining some backwards-compatibility. It allows any media in your library (including non-DRM iTunes content) to be accessed by other networked players.

TwonkyMedia's player appears in the Manager alongside any detected uPnP/DLNA clients. Using it is very simple – double-click on a file in the library and it opens up, with a series of basic transport controls. The range of compatible formats depends on the codecs you've installed, but DVD playback isn't supported. A full-screen mode is available.

Twonky will act as a uPnP/DLNA client, so you can experience media stored elsewhere on your network. You can select the files for playback directly, or drag and drop selected ones into a playlist. Once compiled, this can be dragged and dropped onto any available player. Great for parties, in other words, although playlists aren't restricted to just audio. You can also drag individual songs/albums or video clips onto a player.

Tempting though this functionality is, you need a device that can be specifically controlled by Twonky MediaManager. At a pinch, this could be another PC running the software. I had two PCs running TwonkyMedia Manager on the same network, and found that a playlist of media created on one machine could indeed be 'pushed' to the other. Very cool. However, Twonky proved somewhat unreliable and resource-hungry in use. ➤



Twonky Media Manager gets serious: Basic system settings can be set (top) while file-browsing offers multiple search options



[peeeooooow!!]

Great games need great sound effects. You're never going to be prepared for the 'Call Of Duty' or gain that 'Medal Of Honour' until you immerse yourself in surround-sound. We've built gaming modes into our whole range of A/V Receivers, which is why, with Onkyo's surround-sound your gaming experience will be taken to the next level.

Gameplay, taken seriously.



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IMAGINATIVE SIGHT & SOUND

THE NEXT GENERATION IN AV RECEIVERS.

30 SET YOUR MEDIA FREE!

Also consider...

Other 'no-cost' media player/server options

If your computer is running Windows XP or Vista, it's well worth investing some time with Windows Media Player 11. This free software has strong support for different media types (including DVDs); library organisation of your files; and CD ripping facilities. You also get a decent uPnP server that will deal out any photos, audio or video to networked media players and other 'puters, plus various plugins that change the GUI appearance (skins) and add compatibility with various audio and video codecs (including H.264 and DivX/XVID). If you don't want the newer version and use XP, search Google for the free Windows Media Connect uPnP server (wmcsetup_en.exe, 6.45MB file size). Unfortunately, it no longer appears to be available on Microsoft's website.

Mac users will probably already be running iTunes 8, a free download (www.apple.com/itunes) that's also available for Windows. A natural partner for the iPod, it's obviously biased towards audio, although video isn't forgotten. It boasts a CD ripper/burner; a powerful media library; Apple's Genius technology for automatic generation of complementary music playlists; and neat dovetailing with the iTunes store. Server functionality is limited; any media clients or computers on your network must have native iTunes support.

If you have a file that no other media player can cope with, have a shufti at the VLC media player. This excellent free download (www.videolan.org) is available for a multitude of platforms including Windows, MacOS and Linux.

TVersity

Cost: Free (Pro version €30)

www.tversity.com

Use for: Windows XP/2000/2003/Vista

TVersity's primary role is that of a uPnP media server, as opposed to a media player. However, it has some interesting tricks up its sleeve – in addition to remote access, it will transcode any media in your library if any of the players don't support them.

You can choose devices manually but the 'auto-detect' function is recommended, and very useful for devices with limited codec support. Everyday use is easy. Go to the library tab and add files – audio, photos and video (standard/hi-def) are all catered for. To play library content double-click on it, and it opens up in a web browser. This takes a while, but the only alternative is to use a Flash web interface for previewing media. Yet this greedily snaps up system resources, especially if you're playing video, because real-time



TVersity tech: TVersity is unusual in being able to transcode formats on the fly (top), but content can be easily added to its library

transcoding (into flv) has to take place!

If TVersity cannot integrate a media player, it should instead directly pass the file to a player that's specified in the program's settings – hopefully, this will be added in future. However Microsoft's WMC, if available, can access your TVersity library. Another feature that TVersity's developers should consider is the background transcoding of entire incompatible files (as opposed to cached bits and pieces) at high quality.

Some current features, notably the ability to stream premium online content, require the €30 Pro version. Whether this is worth bothering with is debatable; due to copyright restrictions, little such content would be available in the UK. However, some online media – YouTube, Flickr, RSS newsfeeds and net radio – is accessible in the standard version. In short, TVersity is an excellent media server, but a mediocre media player.



XBMC: The graphical user interface offers access to Apple's movie trailers in HD (top), and makes browsing media a breeze

XBMC Media Center

Cost: Free

www.xbmc.org

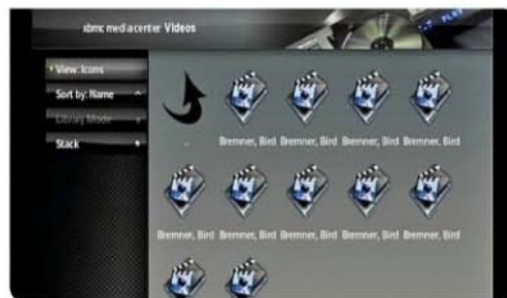
Use for: MacOS, AppleTV, Windows XP/Vista and Linux

It may have started life on the modified Xbox, but XBMC Media Center has since been ported to other platforms. The Windows version proved easy to install – no hardware hackery required here. Its default mode is full-screen, which is better for video playback; there is however also a resizable 'windowed' mode. When started, the program gives you a beautifully designed main menu from which various options are available. These include playback of video, audio and pictures – basically, you use the 'add source' feature to specify the folders or servers (SMB/UPnP/iTunes share) where your content resides.

There's also a weather display option, and 'scripts'. This latter is particularly clever, as it allows new services (such as iTunes movie trailers, YouTube and BBC iPlayer) and features to be added. In the final settings option, you can configure the onboard uPnP server (it can stream media to networked players and other PCs).

In use, XBMC is smooth and reliable. It behaves so much like a consumer-electronics product that you forget it's running under Windows. Video and music look and sound great, and on top of this

Multiple views: The XBMC offers wide video file format compatibility



XBMC is compatible with hi-def content – including x.264 .mkv files. The team responsible for XBMC should be congratulated for their well-considered efforts. Free it may be, but XBMC is superior to many commercial products.

XBMC Media Center (XBox version)

Cost: Free (second-hand Xbox £10 upwards)
Available from: Search the 'net for Xbox 'binaries'.
For legal reasons, they're not hosted on xbmc.org.
Use for: Xbox (original model, not 360)

If you search the internet, you'll find a version of XBMC that will install on the original Xbox. The end result is a media player that's more advanced than many of its rivals units, despite the miniscule outlay. It can play media from folders shared on the network, uPnP servers, the local hard drive or CD/DVD-ROM drive. Although file/codec support is wide – multiregion DVD and CDs too – the Xbox version cannot play high-definition video, even with imported component-output kit. This is because the original Xbox design simply lacks the necessary processing power.

Getting XBMC on this venerable console isn't easy, though. Ideally, you would install a 'modchip' – a device that increases the flexibility of an Xbox considerably – and then FTP across the XBMC installation files from a PC. However, non-modchip alternatives are available. One, hot-swapping, involves disconnecting the Xbox HDD while the system is running. Another, which doesn't require disassembly, exploits a security loophole that exists in a handful of Xbox games together with a device known as Action Replay.

Hassle all around, but the results are worth it. With a modchipped Xbox, the latest (beta) XBMC delivered excellent picture and sound quality coupled with a superb user interface. The visualisation display associated with audio playback takes impressive advantage of the console's nVidia graphics chipset. Quite an achievement for what is ageing hardware. I experienced a handful of annoyances, though.

Photo replay wouldn't work, and I couldn't get DTS bitstreams out of the unit.



Visual flair: Using a modded Xbox for audio replay is surprisingly satisfying



Boxee

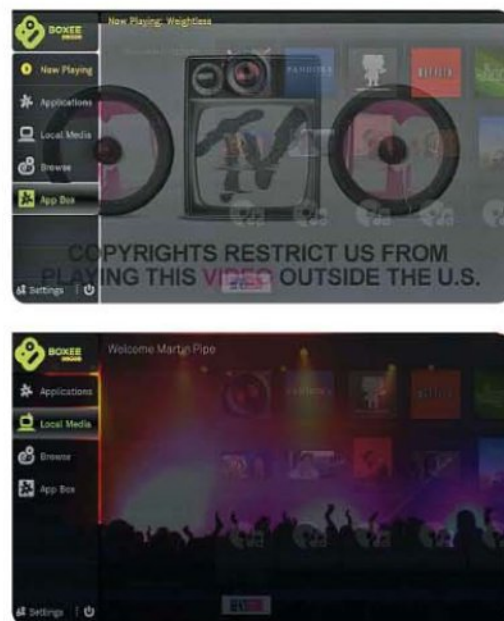
Cost: Free
Available from: boxee.tv
Use for: MacOS, Linux, Windows (XP/Vista/7) AppleTV (via USB patch)

You've tried social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace. How about a social media centre? Yep, with Boxee you can share what you're watching with other users, and it's possible to view and recommend content.

The platform – which has at its core a version of XBMC – requires you to sign up before downloading the software. This identifies you, thereby enabling the social-networking features. An integrated BitTorrent client speeds up downloading of legal content. You can even use an iPod Touch/iPhone as a remote handset (a similar plugin is available for XBMC). Boxee's future plans even include a dedicated set-top box.

The Boxee user interface has a similar organic feel to XBMC. You can play locally-stored or networked video, audio or photos, and the wide range of supported codecs will be familiar to XBMC users. uPnP and SMB network shares are catered for, as are CDs and DVDs. Multichannel audio can be passed to an AV system via a digital output, should your PC/soundcard have one.

Like XBMC, Boxee supports plugins. One of Boxee's killer apps is its provision for on-line content, although much of this is unavailable in Blighty for copyright reasons. You'll also need a fast machine to take full advantage of Boxee; XBMC is less resource-hungry. Locally networked and HDD-stored video fared well, although some of the 'net content looked ropey when upscaled to fullscreen – the effect is worse if you've connected your PC to a large-screen TV. Overall, though, Boxee is an interesting proposition that deserves to succeed. It's worth keeping an eye on.



Boxed out: Boxee allows access to multiple internet TV services, provided you live in the right place – UK viewers have no access to the prime content (top). The main GUI is also a tad unconventional, with its left-hand menu system

And the best media software is...

There's no doubt that when it comes to media servers/organisers/players, our undoubted favourite is XBMC. It provides an incredible amount of functionality, coupled with a superb user interface and excellent AV quality. TVersity is a worthwhile server, although its media playback functionality is at best primitive. Boxee is based on XBMC, and adds some interesting features at the expense of system resources. Sadly TwonkyMedia – the only one that has to be paid for, after the 30-day trial period – is too unreliable to earn a recommendation. It was hard on PC resources and its manager component tended to lock up with alarming regularity, even when carrying out simple tasks like adding library files to a playlist.

The server would also crash frequently; disabling firewalls and shutting down unused applications had no effect. We hope that the bugs are sorted out before too long; in the meantime, we'll keep an eye on newer versions as they're released.

You could argue that Windows Media Center is also commercial software, but it comes bundled with some versions of Windows and as such is effectively free. It has its limitations, but works well overall. If you already have it on your PC, why not investigate it further? If your games console of choice is the Xbox 360, then you really have no excuse. This is because the console will act as a Media Center Extender, playing media files streamed from your PC over a network. But my bet is that you'll soon come back to XBMC ●

Home
Cinema
Heroes
No. 26



Rik Henderson celebrates the king of CG 'toons

Pixel perfection



Small scale: Pixar's shorts, like *Presto* (pictured), are as well-crafted and animated as the features they accompany

To date, Pixar Animation Studios has won 22 Oscars, four Golden Globes and three Grammys. Its first five feature films grossed over \$2.5 billion. *Finding Nemo* has grossed around \$800 million alone. And critical acclaim has matched its financial success. Not bad for a company that makes cartoons.

In essence, Pixar has replaced Disney. There was a time that a Disney animated movie was a major event, sending families to the cinema *en masse* for each and every release. But the corporation faltered in its ideas and quality control and failed to capitalise on *The Lion King*, its last great success. Up stepped computer animation specialists Pixar, which had been liberated from George Lucas' grasp back in the '80s by Apple's Steve Jobs, and had started out designing and selling imaging computers.

Therefore, when *Toy Story* was mooted by John Lasseter's small animation department, there were a fair few eyebrows raised, partly from the 2D animation community and partly from the iPod impresario himself, who was about to pull the plug on the whole company: an entire movie? Made on computers? 'Tis witchcraft surely.

However, in 1995, *Toy Story* was released (via a distribution deal with Disney), and subsequently went on to trouser \$350 million worldwide. And, much-publicised fall-out with (and latter buyout by) Disney along the way, there is now not a more consistent film production studio, in quality and earning potential, on the planet.

Inspirational animators

Not only has Pixar found a winning formula of sumptuous 3D visuals and intelligent, creative writing, it has also redefined the animated movie genre. Without John Lasseter (who, incidentally, is now also the chief creative officer at the Walt Disney Animation Studios) and his merry band, we wouldn't have *Shrek*, *Ice Age*, *Madagascar* or any one of the other multitudes of excellent rival CG animated films. Indeed, we probably wouldn't even have Henry Selick's stop-motion animated *Coraline* or the *Wallace and Gromit* feature film, as they'd probably never have gotten a cinematic release if it wasn't for Pixar's success.

So raise a glass to a plucky bunch of computer nerds who, quite frankly, changed the world of cinema forever. They made it cool to be a kid again. We salute you... ●

Quintessential Pixar... Creating an icon with Luxo Jr



1 Let there be light

This early short demonstrates Pixar's skill at injecting inanimate objects with life



2 Oh balls!

In this case, it's two lamps playing with a ball. Until the smaller one, Luxo Jr. deflates it by jumping on it



3 Bigger is better

Admonished by the larger lamp, Luxo Jr. runs off, only to return chasing an even larger ball across the desk...



4 A star is born

...leaving the larger lamp wondering what will happen next – which was Luxo Jr.'s adoption as a Pixar icon.

Must own...



WALL-E

Buena Vista → Region B BD
£27 Approx

Two robots fall in love and embark on the cutest, most laugh-out-loud funny space odyssey you'll ever experience. Simply brilliant.

00.01: It's hard to think of a contemporary live action film, let alone another cartoon, that would be brave enough to forgo dialogue for its entire first act.

33.44: The spectacular Blu-ray visuals served up during Wall-E's trip into space will leave you every bit as awe-struck as the little robot himself.



The Incredibles

Buena Vista → R2 Collector's Edition DVD → £23 Approx

After the commercial failure of *The Iron Giant*, writer/director Brad Bird jumped aboard the Pixar train for this sensational superhero story packed with loving references to the likes of *The Fantastic Four* and *Watchmen*.

30.34: The jungle chase delivers AV thrills 'n' spills – but we want a Blu-ray!

93.05: High drama, epic action, inventive use of super-powers and plenty of laughs – *The Incredibles* delivers the kind of finale that most superhero films can only dream of.



Toy Story 2

Buena Vista → R2 Collector's Edition DVD → £20 Approx

Pixar rejuvenated the animated feature film genre with *Toy Story* in 1995. Four years later it delivered a sequel that bettered the original in every way imaginable.

01.11: The film kicks off with a stunning action sequence, with Buzz Lightyear flying through space and taking on Emperor Zurg's minions.

35.53: Just crossing a road is a massive adventure for Buzz and the other toys, and the DD 5.1 EX soundtrack ramps up the thrills.



Finding Nemo

Buena Vista → R2 Collector's Edition DVD → £20 Approx

Hailed by many as Pixar's best film, *Finding Nemo*'s touching, funny and dramatic tale of a clownfish searching for his lost son.

02.47: *Finding Nemo* begins with a sequence that almost pips the death of Bambi's mum in the 'emotionally scar-your-child-for-life' stakes.

56.37: As good as the anamorphic 1.78:1 transfer looks, the native resolution of the DVD results in occasional aliasing, as seen on the edge of the seagulls' wings in this shot.

Worth seeing...



Ratatouille

Buena Vista → Region B BD
£24 Approx

Rats and restaurants shouldn't mix, but writer Brad Bird makes the idea seem positively charming. So even though it did poor business in the stuffed-toy stakes, *Ratatouille* is still vintage Pixar, mixing phenomenal animation and immersive audio with a witty, succulent script and energetic set pieces.

09.36: The escape from the old lady's cottage is a cacophony of gunshots and scurrying rats, all immaculately rendered by an uncompressed PCM 5.1 mix. A demo-worthy sequence.



Monsters, Inc.

Buena Vista → All-Region BD
£24 Approx

Scared of the monsters under your bed? Don't be – if they're anything like the loveable scream-collectors Mike and Sully, in this cracking CG toon that made headlines for its accurate computer-rendered fur.

04.51: The first look at Sully in 1080p is a real stunner – check out the incredible detailing, picking out each strand of his blue and purple fur.

23.08: *Monsters Inc.*'s biggest laughs come as Sully confronts every monster's worst nightmare – a cute little girl!



A Bug's Life

Buena Vista → All-region BD (US Import) → £20 Approx

The Seven Samurai gets an insect makeover in this tale of an ant looking to save his colony from food-stealing grasshoppers. Great voice cast, excellent gags and stunning animation make this a joy to watch.

11.29: This close-up of Hopper's leering face is packed with incredible detailing and fine textures. BD gold!

81.22: The rainfall arrives, bringing with it a DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio experience that feels like Pixar's answer to *...Private Ryan*'s beach sequence.



Cars

Buena Vista → All-Region BD
£24 Approx

Pixar made an unusual wrong turn with this lacklustre 'toon about a hotshot racecar trapped in small town America. The story is obvious and the gags are rusty. On the plus side, kids loved it and it sold heaps of toys. A sequel beckons.

01.54: The opening race is a real AV thrill ride, packing in sensational hi-def visuals and a raucous Dolby TrueHD 5.1 soundtrack.

76.49: Old-timer Doc relives his glory years and shows us all the art of drifting on a dirt track.

Teufel System 5 THX Select 2

THE FIRST SURROUND SET WORLDWIDE

CERTIFIED WITH THE THX SELECT 2 LICENCE

Teufel



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— no phase shifts, less distortion, no centralised sound - simply brilliant sound!

> Comes standard with two subwoofers
— with enormous long-stroke ability thanks to THX Select 2!

> Two Dipoles with included woofers
— scattered diffusion which provides unbelievable sound!

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7 good reasons for Teufel speakers

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- >> Developed in our own sound lab in Berlin
- >> 30 years of experience
- >> Unbeatable value for money
- >> Excellent service plus an 8-week money-back guarantee
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INSTALLS

→ **Smarthome highlights** NAIM High-end DAC to turn your MP3s into audiophile analogue **WHARFSIDE** Cinema seating made simple **LOEWE** Install-friendly 52in Mediacenter TV **THE BIG PICTURE** Transforming a garage into a dedicated home cinema room **CERTIFIED AV-HOLIC!** An *HCC* reader guides you through his home cinema setup



Going for gold

Former Olympic athlete Iwan Thomas has caught the home cinema bug. Take a tour of his install on p38

Pro training for THX-heads

THX is still key to great home cinema, and installers know it...

THX has got the sort of home cinema reputation most organisations can only dream of – and the Lucasfilms-launched organisation is a big fish in the Custom Install world, too.

As reported back in *HCC* #171, THX recently made a triumphant return to the UK custom install trade when it held its world-famous Professional Home Theater 1 (PHT) certification course alongside the UK's CEDIA Expo exhibition. This was the first time THX had trained installers in the UK for many years, so *HCC* jumped at the opportunity to catch-up with John Dahl, Senior Fellow Director of THX, and director of THX's training and education.

Hard master

Dahl has specialised in audio and acoustics for over 20 years, and is well versed in the history of THX. The organisation split from Lucasfilm back in 2002, but its standards are still rigorously observed: around 7,000 cinemas worldwide have been de-certified for 'unsatisfactory performance'.

'As far as the THX education operation goes, we don't really favour any particular AV brand,' John explained to *HCC*. 'What we are more concerned about is how it is handled to make a good installation: personal skill can't be purchased over the internet.'

'With THX training the installer can look the client in the eye and tell him or her that they are going to get a good result, and that it's going to be worth the money paid for the job.'

John believes that design, installation and calibration remain the key factors for delivering a well-installed system, and this is 'exactly what THX certification can achieve.'

CI professionals attending THX's Home Theater 1 course



The organisation's recent training event was attended by 39 CI professionals, mostly from the UK but with some travelling in from India, Finland and Hong Kong.

The nine-hour Level 1 course covered all aspects of THX control, which works independently of other brands and technologies. THX philosophy and actions focus on whether the entire system is producing a good or bad experience.

Particular attention is paid to room calibration. Typically in the US, about \$1,500 a visit is charged to consumers who require this service.

Passing Level 1 entitles a company to use the Professional 1 THX logo – but only next to the name of the individual who attended and passed the exam, not the whole company. Look for it amid *HCC*'s advertisers. Level 2 training will be coming to the UK soon.

For more on THX, go to www.thx.com.



Testing times: THX control works independently of other brands and technologies

The Apple of DAC's eye



If anything, hi-fi has become more (not less) important since the advent of the iPod, and it's

interesting to see what is essentially considered a low-end sound source getting so much hi-end love and attention. The new Naim DAC is the latest high-end kit flavoured with Apple. A high-performance, zero jitter, digital-to-analogue converter, it unusually facilitates USB memory stick playback and fully authenticates digital connection from an iPhone or iPod. It's also touted to be the first high-end DAC to be officially certified by Apple for the iPod. If you want to convert nasty digital signals into fluffy, real-world analogue, then £1,950 gets you Naim's baby.

Seat of your dreams



How do you tell a professional installation from a home-built job? Easy – pro installs include genuine cinema seating. Okay, not strictly true. But if you are serious about investing in your own cinema you'll need to set aside cash for at least one authentic seat. Cue Wharfedale's new range, which can be configured to suit the style and size of any home – in other words, they're flexible.

For those short on space, the seats can be connected via interlinking armrests – with the added bonus of built-in storage compartments in the arms. Prices vary from £900 to £3,000 per seat, depending on design and specification.

The pro's choice



Procella's latest loudspeakers have been designed with small or medium home cinemas in mind. The P6 satellites are the dinkier siblings of the renowned P8s, and have been designed with 'Identical Voice' compatibility, so you can use the P6s as your rears, with P8s at the front if you wanted to. Only 135mm deep, the P6 boasts a 6.5in woofer for mid- and bass.

Accompanying the P6s is the new P10 subwoofer. Itself only 180mm deep, it has two opposing 10in woofers and a top-of-the range 200W+200W ICE power amp. P6s are £950 each, and the P10 is £2,500, so you're looking at £7,500 for a 5.1 set-up. Distributed by www.pulsemarketing.com.

Loewe machine



Loewe's Reference TV entertainment system (launched at the recent IFA tech-fest) upgrades

its previous incarnation in groundbreaking fashion. Intended for installation by Loewe professionals, it combines a motorised 52in Full HD, 200Hz LCD TV, Mediacenter, Assist Media remote control and Loewe's new, super-thin, electrostatic Reference Sound Standspeakers and subwoofer.

A built-in DR+ hard-disk recorder boasts 500GB, while Mediacenter allows access to multimedia files and 'net radio; has an iPod/iPhone interface; and can play DVDs/CDs – as well as offering flexible multi-room upgrades. The ultimate all-in-one designer AV system? Quite possibly...



Max Payne Motion Picture © 2008 Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation

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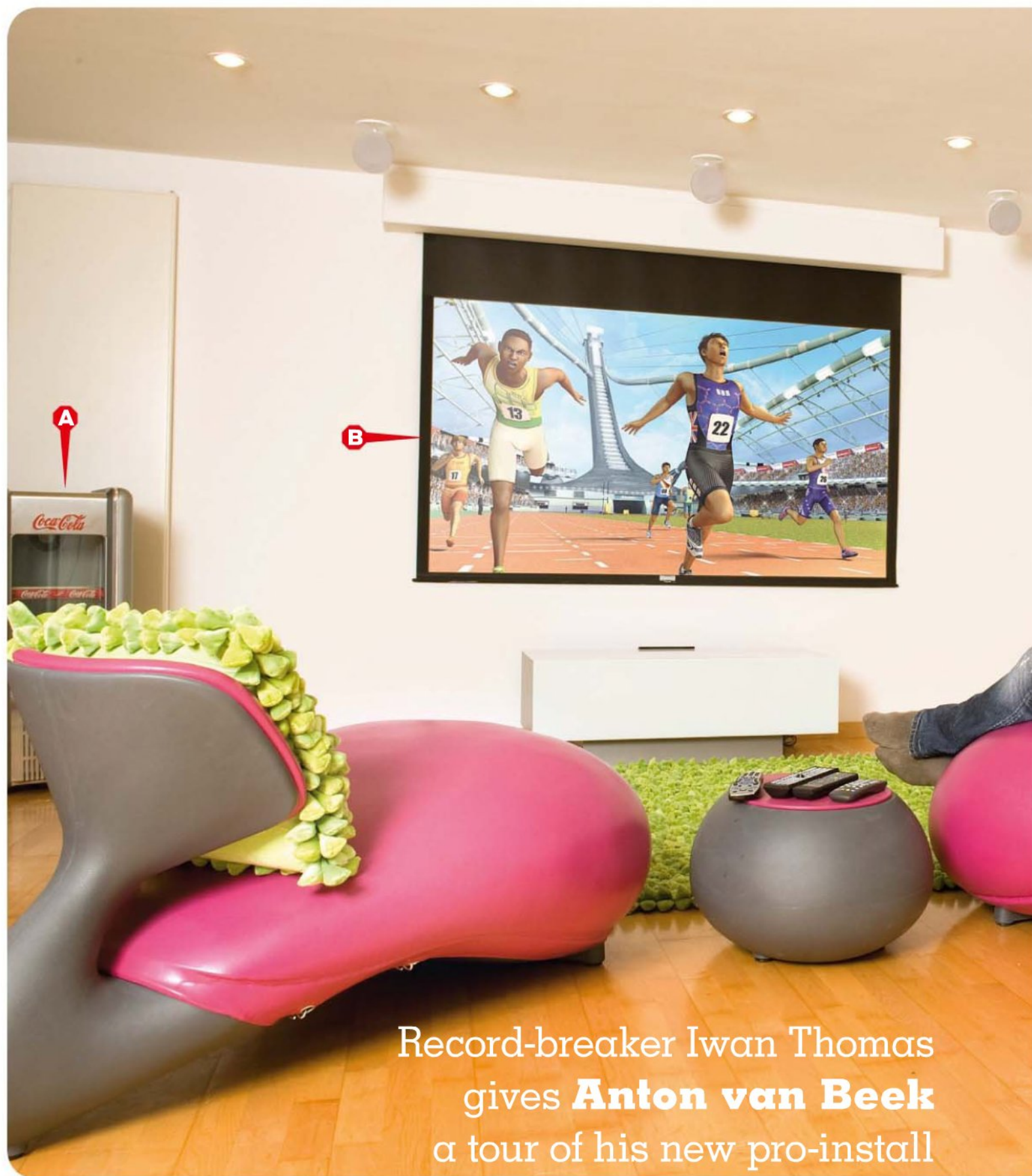
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Going for gold



Record-breaker Iwan Thomas
gives **Anton van Beek**
a tour of his new pro-install

Room essentials

A Champion's choice

No cinema room is complete without some ice-cold refreshments – hence this official Coca-Cola fridge lurking in the corner

B Picture of perfection

A Cosmopolitan electric projection screen from Da-Lite syncs up with the SIM2 HT300 projector to provide the bigscreen viewing

→Kit Checklist

SIM2: HT300 Xtra-H projector
Da-Lite: Cosmopolitan electric projection screen
Onkyo: Blu-ray player
Onkyo: TX-NR906 AV receiver
Onkyo: iPod dock
Focal Dome: 5.1 home cinema speaker package
The Chord Company: Rumour 2 speaker cable; HDMI Silver Plus; Chameleon Silver Plus subwoofer cable
Spectral: Brick AV cabinet
Nintendo: Wii
Microsoft: Xbox 360
Sony: PlayStation 3
Toshiba: 37in LCD (lounge)
Onkyo: Mini System (gym)
Onkyo: iPod dock (gym)
Focal: Sib speakers (gym)



At the 1998 European Championships in Budapest (pictured right), Iwan won gold medals in the 400m and 4 x 400m



Not every professional home theatre installation is the result of months of planning. Sometimes fate just takes a more serendipitous turn and things come together out of the blue. Which is exactly what happened to Olympic athlete (and, don't forget, *Celebrity Masterchef* runner-up) Iwan Thomas.

'It was a bit strange the way it all came about,' Iwan told *HCC*. 'I had a personal appearance in Harrods and a gentleman came up and said that one of his colleagues was an athlete and would like to say "hello". It turned out to be Phil Hardaway [the UK Sales Manager of The Chord Company]. We started talking, he explained what his company did, and I said it was a shame that I hadn't met him about a month ago as I had been having my house renovated!'

Despite that, Hardaway offered to come to Thomas' property and see what could be done, and brought along Fraser Robertson of Focal JM Lab to help spec equipment.

The former athlete's original idea was to do something with a lounge space upstairs that housed a 50in plasma screen, perhaps by adding a decent surround system. But, because the ground floor contained an unused room that was now little more than a walk-through to the newly-built gym, Hardaway saw the potential for something better. 'He got quite excited and started talking to himself – 'Ooh, you could do this... Ooh, you could do that,' says Iwan. 'My relationship with technology isn't the best, so I asked him to explain, and before I knew it the whole cinema room came together.'

'It was a great surprise, because I didn't ever picture it. I suppose I didn't have the know-how to imagine what you could do with the room.'

40 INSTALL



Learning curve: Iwan admits it took a while to get used to using his new AV equipment but he's a whizz at it now: 'If I can use it, it's pretty much idiot-proof'

Hardaway had the idea of installing a projector system in the room; indeed, a projector had been the last thing on Iwan's mind. 'I was concerned that it would be a bit grainy and not very good, because the only ones I've seen were in pubs and they never seem to have that great a picture!' However, after being shown what was possible with hi-def content, he was seduced by the idea of a more elaborate installation.

Home hub

While not part of the original plan for his refurbished house, the dedicated theatre is now Iwan's 'favourite room in the house,' and getting a lot of use.

'I've got my Sky+HD and everything rigged up to that room, plus my Xbox and Wii,' reveals the gold medal-winner. 'So I don't only watch films on the cinema screen – I'm forever watching football matches and other bits and pieces.

As for movies, Iwan has been putting his HD system through its paces with films like the recent *Rambo* flick. 'Action-packed films seem to look really good on the big screen,' he says. 'And the sound as well. It was all very well before watching films upstairs, but now that I've got this amazing sound system, it rocks! The whole house shakes! It's literally as good as being in the cinema. So I'm forever buying new films, I just love watching them.'

Iwan definitely seems to have been bitten by the home cinema bug. And he already has future plans. 'There is another room upstairs where I've got a TV up on the wall, but I've yet to have all the cables run through the walls. The cinema room is done so well, it's pointed out other things wrong in my house and I want to get them done!' ●



C Power packed

Onkyo's 7.1-channel TX-NR906 receiver is so imposing it only leaves room in this cabinet for the diminutive Nintendo Wii

D Three's company

In order of descent: a Sky+HD box, Xbox 360, and Onkyo Blu-ray player

E Eyes ahead

In the gym, this 37in Toshiba LCD provides some distraction when Iwan is pounding the treadmill

F Overhead smash

The 400m runner wasn't convinced by projectors until he was shown what SIM2's HT300 Xtra-H could do

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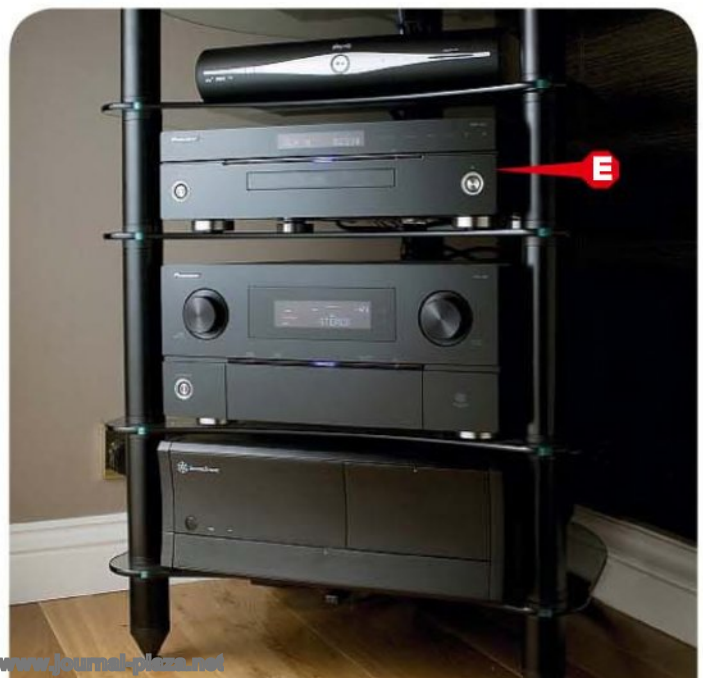


Garage glamour

Park your car outside, and have a home cinema instead, says **Mark Craven**



The fake chimney-breast was built to house the projection screen





The screen lifts to reveal a Pioneer PDP-506XDE plasma TV

→ Kit Checklist

Philips: Pronto touchscreen
 Screen Research: 80in wide multi-aspect electric screen
 JVC: HD350 1080P three-chip projector
 The Big Picture: Custom-made 'invisible' projector bracket
 Pioneer: SC-LX81 AVR
 Pioneer: BDP-LX71 Blu-ray player
 Pioneer: PDP-506XDE plasma
 The Big Picture: Custom-made 11TB quad-core media server
 Logitech: diNovo Edge wireless keyboard
 B&W: CWM LCR8 centre speaker
 Velodyne: SPL-1200 Ultra subwoofer
 Lutron: Grafik Eye GRX3106
 Lutron: Accessory switches
 Sony: PlayStation
 B&W: DM602 loudspeakers
 Sky: Sky+HD

The owner of this startling CEDIA-nominated converted garage wanted 'the ultimate bigscreen home cinema solution suitable for use by three generations of one family'. Installer The Big Picture took up the challenge.

The company's first idea was to give the bland garage space a defining feature. The solution? A false chimney-breast that could also house the projector screen, plasma TV and centre speaker.

When it came to video, the installer and owner specced a JVC D-ILA 1080p projector with a multi-masking Screen Research electric drop-down screen. When alternating between 16:9 and 2.35:1 movies, the screen masks to suit, avoiding grey bars at the top and bottom of the image, which can reduce the apparent contrast ratio.

For audio, the owner's existing B&W speakers were integrated into the new system, although the centre was swapped out for a new in-wall B&W CWM 650.

Other improvements include an upgrade to the existing lighting system, the creation of an 'invisible' bracket just bellowing the ceiling for the projector, and the installation of a media PC, gigabit network switch and Cat-6 cabling to deliver super-fast broadband to the room.

The owner describes this glammed-up garage as 'a world class home cinema room with the wow factor.' And we can't argue with that!

Room essentials

A Focal point

This chimney-breast was added to give the room some added visual flair – and to hide the projector screen

B Master control

A touchscreen Philips pronto is used for system control – no more multiple handsets

C Surrounded by sound

Bowers & Wilkins standmount speakers join forces with a Velodyne subwoofer to create real cinematic thrills

D D-ILA diva

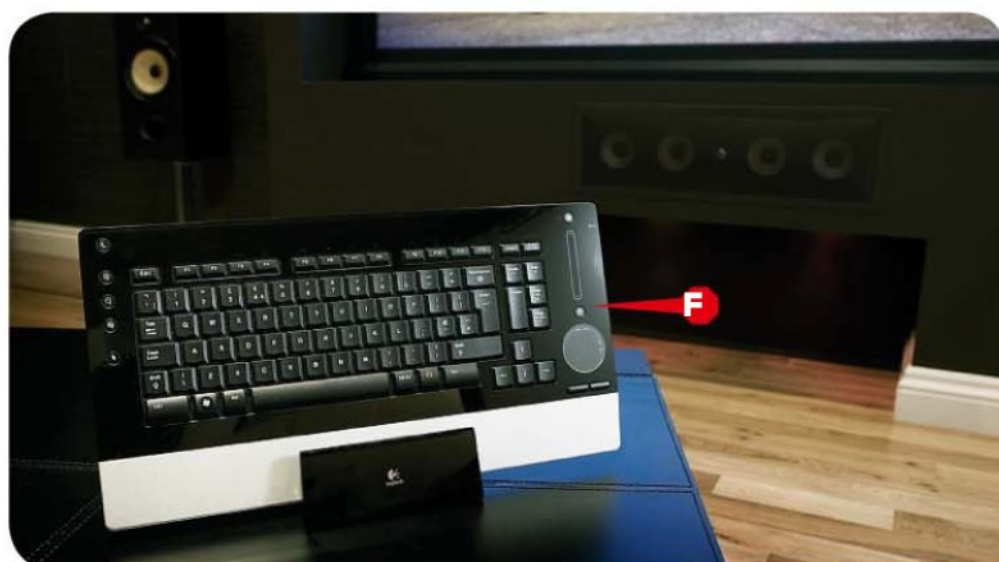
JVC's Full HD projectors consistently wow us with their picture prowess – no wonder they appeal to the custom install market

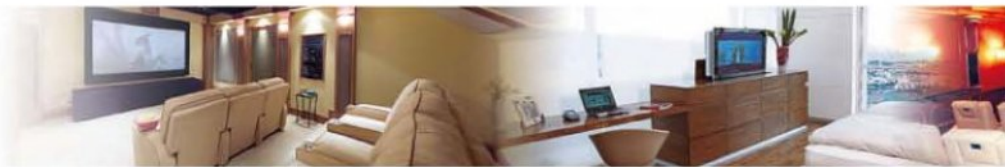
E Deadly duo

Cutting-edge Pioneer Blu-ray and AVR components sit in the kit rack

F Wireless wonder

This keyboard controls the custom-built media centre PC





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What's your name and how old are you?

Richard Gifford, age 39.

What's your occupation?

I'm a Customer Services representative.

Would you consider yourself an AV addict?

Definitely. I've been into hi-fi since I was very young but I first became interested in home cinema when I was 25, after purchasing a second-hand Pioneer Dolby surround amp. I love the fact that you can create a very impressive sound and picture at home; I just wish I lived in a detached house, as I'm pretty sure my neighbours don't like it when I crank up the volume on films like *Master and Commander*.

What's in your cinema setup?

My surround system is made up of Bowers and Wilkins loudspeakers and a Mission subwoofer. I've got a Pioneer amp and DVD player, Humax Freesat receiver, 42in Toshiba LCD and a Sony VPL-HS20

projector. I've also got two Blu-ray players, a Pioneer BDP-LX71 and a Sony BDP-350S. This is because the Sony projector is only 1080i-capable so I'd have to keep changing the output if I just used one player (I wish they would put two HDMI outputs on Blu-ray players!). I simply leave the Sony BD plugged into the projector, and use the Pioneer to watch films on the 1080p-capable TV.

What's your newest indulgence?

The Humax receiver.

And what's next?

I think I'll probably look at buying another projector. Maybe an InFocus or another Sony, as I've been very satisfied with the current one.

How much have you spent on your hobby over the years?

At least £20,000.

What's your current fave disc?

Traffic, starring Michael Douglas.

Are you excited about hi-def?

Yes, very – especially 4K2K when it arrives ●

Room essentials

A Towering inferno

Yet another AV-holic with Bowers & Wilkins floorstanders speakers – in this case Nautilus tweeter-toting 683s

B Two's company

There are two Blu-ray players, here: one permanently feeds the Sony projector, the other is hooked up to the LCD. Sweet

C Get down

When bigscreen entertainment is required, this drop-down screen can be called into play

D Bass monster

The Mission M5AS subwoofer, with its 350W amp and 12in driver, adds some low-end fun to our AV-holic's room

Join the club

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REVIEWS

→ **Hardware highlights** PANASONIC Mammoth 65in Freesat HD plasma
 SONY PlayStation 3 Slim and VW85 projector KEF Gorgeous XQ Series 5.1 package LG New Blu-ray
 deck does wi-fi TECHNISAT Euro Freesat receiver for sat TV addicts SAMSUNG Edge LED TV and
 flagship BD player NAD £1,000 hi-rez AVR TOSHIBA Bargain DVD-spinner AND MORE!

Massive audio

Paradigm Reference's 7.1 system uses 39 different drivers to create the ultimate surround sound experience. Turn to p56 to find out how it sounds

HCC Ratings key

Outstanding	1 2 3 4 5
Above average	1 2 3 4 5
Acceptable	1 2 3 4 5
Disappointing	1 2 3 4 5
Dire	1 2 3 4 5

HCC DOESN'T BELIEVE IN OVER-PRAISING HARDWARE. CONSEQUENTLY, A THREE-STAR RATING SHOULDN'T BE CONSIDERED A BAD RESULT. IT SIMPLY MEANS THAT A PRODUCT PERFORMS ACCORDING TO ITS CATEGORY POSITION. A FIVE-STAR RATING IS ONLY AWARDED IN EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Panasonic plasma thinks big

65in? Gadzooks, says **Chris Jenkins**. Panasonic's monster P65V10 comes up with another winning argument for the longevity of plasma



Replacing last year's PZ800s, Panasonic's V10s are second only to the flagship Z1 screens in its TV range, and have been touted by some as the natural successors to Pioneer's Kuro sets.

While the Z1 series majors on fancy design, the V10s offer the same display tech but with a rather more bread-and-butter design. There's no Wireless HD either, but screen sizes go up to this Greenpeace-baiting 65in version.

As the largest set in the V10 range, the TX-P65V10B has much to live up to, but a cursory look at its spec indicates that all the stops have indeed been pulled out. It's bleeding-edge both in terms of display and functions, and if you have to worry about the price, then you're probably missing the point.

One glass design

The massive NeoPDP plasma panel is surrounded by a black bezel and topped by a silver control bar. The 'one sheet of glass' design does indeed make it impressive, but this is not an overly designed set; you would need to have a very large room or a sliding panel arrangement of some kind to be able to ignore this sizeable slab when it's switched off. The pedestal foot is a huge rectangle in brushed aluminium with a plasticised coating, and the back of the set is a sheet of aluminium which contributes to its considerable 53kg weight.

There has been no attempt to make this set as slim as the Z1, though it's still quite svelte at around two inches thick; the part which protrudes furthest from the back is the connector for the Freesat plug. Otherwise, a familiar selection of connections is situated on the rear.

A side-mounted SD card slot supports JPEG still images, AVI or DivX files up to 720 x 576 resolution, and AVCHD files. It'll be useful to owners of one of Panasonic's SD card-toting cameras or camcorders, though I'm not sure it's a substitute for the convenience of a USB socket.

The panel is, of course, Full HD 1,920 x 1,080 resolution, and claims an 'Infinite Black' contrast ratio of over 2,000,000:1 in

Dynamic mode, and a more down-to-earth 40,000:1 in native mode. Multimedia functions include access to websites through Viera Cast, still-image display using the Viera Image Viewer, and networking using the DLNA standard.

HD on tap

The TX-650V10B has three tuners: analogue, digital and Freesat HD – Panasonic is still championing the upstart sat platform, but it remains to be seen what happens to the platform when rival Freeview HD launches in the coming months. Auto-tuning of Freesat, analogue and digital channels is blindingly fast and efficient.

AV/CV

Product: 65in plasma TV with Freesat HD and THX certification

Position: Panasonic's biggest screen, but under the 54in Z1 in 'flagship' terms

Peers: LG 60PS8000

The OSD uses large, clear text and unfussy icons, while the Picture menu offers a selection of viewing modes. Each of either Normal, Cinema, Games and Dynamic mode uses its own preset levels for brightness, contrast and colour, and there's also a THX setting for movie-viewing, which calibrates the picture to THX-taste. You also get the standard contrast, colour, brightness and sharpness tweaks and a choice of Cool, Normal and Warm colour temp presets. However, for a prestige set such as this, picture tuning parameters just don't go far enough. There is no substitute for manual adjustment of individual RGB levels, despite the fact that the smaller Z1 has them.

Other features include an Eco Mode, which reduces screen brightness and saves power, when you're viewing in a dimly-lit room, and a Multi Window function for picture-in-picture and split screen functions.

The 'VIERA tools' button on the handset brings up access to still and video files from an SD card, control of compatible players via the TV's remote (this includes a 'Pause Live TV' function which works with Panasonic DIGA HDD recorders), and media server access via a network. Note that the DLNA network compatibility extends to still and video files, but not to music formats. Viera Cast, meanwhile, is Panasonic's way of giving you (limited) access to >

→ Specifications

HD Ready: YES including 1080p/24
 Progressive scan: YES NTSC and PAL
 Digital TV tuner: YES and Freesat and analogue

Scart: YES 2 sockets, both RGB

Component video: YES 1 input

HDMI: YES 4 v1.3 inputs

PC Input: YES 1 VGA input

Sound: NICAM stereo 2 x 10W

Resolution: 1,920 x 1,080

Brightness: N/A

Contrast ratio: 2,000,000:1 (claimed)

Dimensions: 1,422(w) x 933(h) x 387(d)mm Weight: 53kg

Features: Viera Link; Viera Image

Viewer; Viera Cast; Q-Link;

Freesat HD; DNLA; SD card slot; CI

card slot; DivX and AVCHD

compatible; 600Hz intelligent

frame creation; 24pSmooth Film

mode; Dolby Digital Plus decoding



Super-sized flatscreens, like Panasonic's TX-65V10B, are becoming a rare sight

HCC Test card

HCC's test card has been designed to torture even the toughest screens...



A Greyscale

Our test card runs from 5% white to 100% black, and presented no problems for the P65V10, performing better than the flagship 46in Z1.

B Golden

Convincing golds often present problems for display technology. Here, the big V10 makes our trophy shine with high-end lustre.

C White detail

The Panasonic pulls the fine detail from challenging white fabric without sacrificing image depth.

the internet. The sites supported at the moment are funny-cat video-fave YouTube, the Picassa photo sharing portal, EuroSport news, Bloomberg financial news and a weather channel. Not a terribly exciting selection, but I think it works faster and more efficiently than comparable systems from Samsung and Sony.

Bigscreen bonanza

You would be rightly miffed if you shelled out close to five grand on a TV and got a dog's dinner of a picture. Good news, then, that the Panasonic's performance is seriously impressive.

Our Tech Labs measured its contrast ratio at over 68,000:1, comfortably outperforming last year's Pioneer Kuro screens in the pure numbers game. Okay, it's not the 2,000,000:1 claimed – but you have to take figures like this with an industrial lorry-load of salt. Despite the ratio, I didn't perceive the blacks to be the blackest ever; in a darkened room there wasn't quite that sense that the image is floating in space.

This minor criticism is very much compensated for by a rich colour palette, which reproduces reds, in particular, with a fidelity rarely seen on plasma screens. Other highpoints include an impeccable rendering of greyscale, and dazzling levels of fine detail, and detail in shadows. Motion-handling is also first rate, although the Intelligent Frame creation (not available in THX or

Game mode) and 24p Smooth Film mode options (to provide smoother playback depending on the frame-rate of the material) should be treated with respect. I managed to get *Infestation* (Blu-ray), looking like both a real movie and a cheap video, depending on the display mode selected.

The TX-P65V10B's pseudo-surround sound system has three settings, V-Audio, V-Audio Surround and V-Audio Surround Pro. Though they do add a progressively greater sense of stereo space, they don't convey any real sense of surround – listen to the effect on speech, and you realise that the effect is actually a short delay. The V10's speakers themselves have a fair amount of oomph, though, and even some bass response.

One-horse race

In essence, the 65V10 offers the picture performance and networking abilities of the brand's highly-regarded Z1, on a much bigger scale, but lacking the arty design, Wireless HD and some of the user picture adjustments. Overall I'd be happy to trade these for the bigger screen size. Considering that there are few other comparable displays on the market right now (if any, actually), it's going to have the super-size flatscreen field pretty much to itself. But what a shame that Panasonic hasn't enabled the level of picture control that fans of a set of this calibre would surely expect.

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



White Screen:

An enormous power consumption that busts our TV scale, though it falls to 351W with Eco Mode in dim lighting

Powered:

You can save power by killing the set's audio. Mute consumption drops to a still huge 563W

TV Contrast: ratio



Picture: Despite relatively low luminance of 20.07fL, contrast ratio is an impressive 68,593:1, or 76,110:1 in Dynamic mode

Colour temp: Kelvin



Presets: The Warm preset is acceptable, but the lack of manual settings is incomprehensible
Normal: 7,120K
Warm: 6,662K
Cool: 9,679K



HCC VERDICT

Panasonic TX-P65V10B
£4,500 Approx

Price check: www.techradar.com/631206

Highs: High-impact bigscreen pictures; Freesat HD

Lows: Lack of manual colour temp controls; limited online content; high power consumption

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5



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Sony has doubled the contrast ratio of its mid-range projector



→ Specifications

HD Ready: YES Full HD, 1080p24

Component video: YES one input

HDMI: YES two v1.3 HDMI's

PC input: YES

Resolution: 1920 x 1080

Brightness (claimed): 800 ANSI Lumens

Contrast ratio (claimed): 120,000:1

Dimensions: 470(w) x 179.2(h) x 482.4(d)mm

Weight: 12kg

Features: Bravia Engine 2; colour enhancement mode; contrast enhancement; advanced iris mode; Bravia Sync; 2 x 12V trigger; lamp life 3,000 hours fan noise 20dB Gamma Adjustment Software via supplied CD-ROM; illuminated remote control

Bigscreen beauty

Sony's SXRD projector sets a high standard, says **Chris Jenkins**



Sony's VW85, a three-panel SXRD (LCoS) projector, is the successor to the brand's very well-received mid-price VW80, and, with a barnstorming performance both in our Tech Labs and on my test bench, it looks set to become a key figure in the home cinema market.

Claimed performance improvements over the VW80 are a doubling in contrast to 120,000:1, (thanks in part to tweaks to the internal filters and light passage), and an improved Advanced Iris system, moving from Iris 2 to Iris 3. Iris 3 is meant to be more responsive to smaller areas of white in a dark background, and should improve tone across the colour range in low light conditions. MotionFlow technology is also featured, which creates intermediate frames from the original video source to double the number of images displayed per second. The idea is to create a smooth and seamless moving image.

The VW85 features a selection of eleven gamma modes, tweaks to the colour presets and user parameters, and an anamorphic zoom mode. Features tailored to the customer installation market including a 12V trigger for electric screens, bundled gamma adjustment software, and a zoned panel alignment function.

Finished in a swoonsome Midnight Sky Black with blue metallic flakes, **the VW85 is a hefty beast, but so smoothly designed that it seems smaller.** All the sockets and controls are arranged along one side, with a small hinged panel covering additional buttons for menu access, lens control and power. The lens is protected by a pair of automatic sliding doors.

The menu system is clear and user-friendly, divided into pages for Picture, Advanced Picture

(accessing the RCP colour adjustment parameters), Screen Modes, Setup, Function (including HDMI settings), Installation (including vertical keystone, image flip and lens control), and, finally, System Information.

The operating noise level is the same as the VW80 – 20dB. This is a boon, as there's nothing worse than a wheezing projector spoiling your fun.

Top dog

After firing up a selection of demo and movie Blu-ray discs, most notably the DTS test platter, my initial impressions of the performance were of stunning levels of detail; images were pin-sharp, and resolution so high I felt I could see every hair on actors' heads – achieved without any discernible sense of image processing.

The black levels are everything Sony claims, too – in shots with a singer illuminated against a black background, the effect was of her floating in space; yet shots of a Japanese tea garden retained detail even in the darkest shadows.

The projector also excelled with the HCC static Test Card. Fine detail and texture were supremely handled, while red peppers popped with postbox vibrancy, and our 'Starman' trophy retained its golden lustre without tipping into yellow.

Some might feel a need to tame the projector's wide colour gamut, but I was wowed by its realistic Technicolor-style presentation.

In summary, the VPL-VW85 is hard to beat for the price. It's not a revolution compared to the VW80, but it is a good step forward. LCoS currently looks like the horse to back for projection systems, and so far, the VW85 is the race leader in this price category. How will JVC's forthcoming D-ILA models shape up? ●

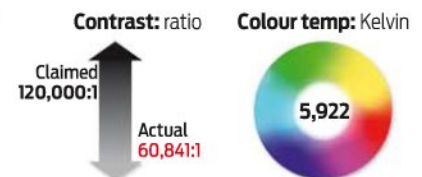
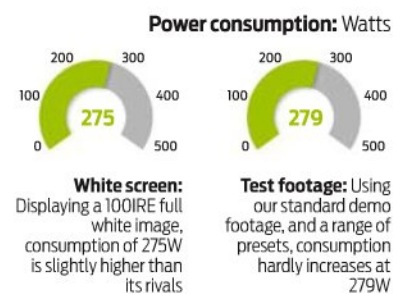
AV/CV

Product:
1080p SXRD
home cinema
projector

Position:
Middle of
Sony's SXRD
range

Peers:
Epson
EH-TW5800;
JVC DLA-
HD750W

→ Tech Labs



Picture: Not up to the claimed levels, but true enough it is double that of the VPL-HW15

Presets: The small selection of colour temperature presets covers a narrow range, with 5,922K the closest, but user R/G/B Gain/bias adjustments deliver a perfect result

High: 7,936K
Middle: 7,042K
Low 1: 5,922K
Low 2: 5,653K

HCC VERDICT

Sony VPL-VW85
£5,400 Approx

Price check: www.techradar.com/627126

Highs: Excellent picture; flexible lens system; extensive user parameters
Lows: MotionFlow technology might not appeal to all

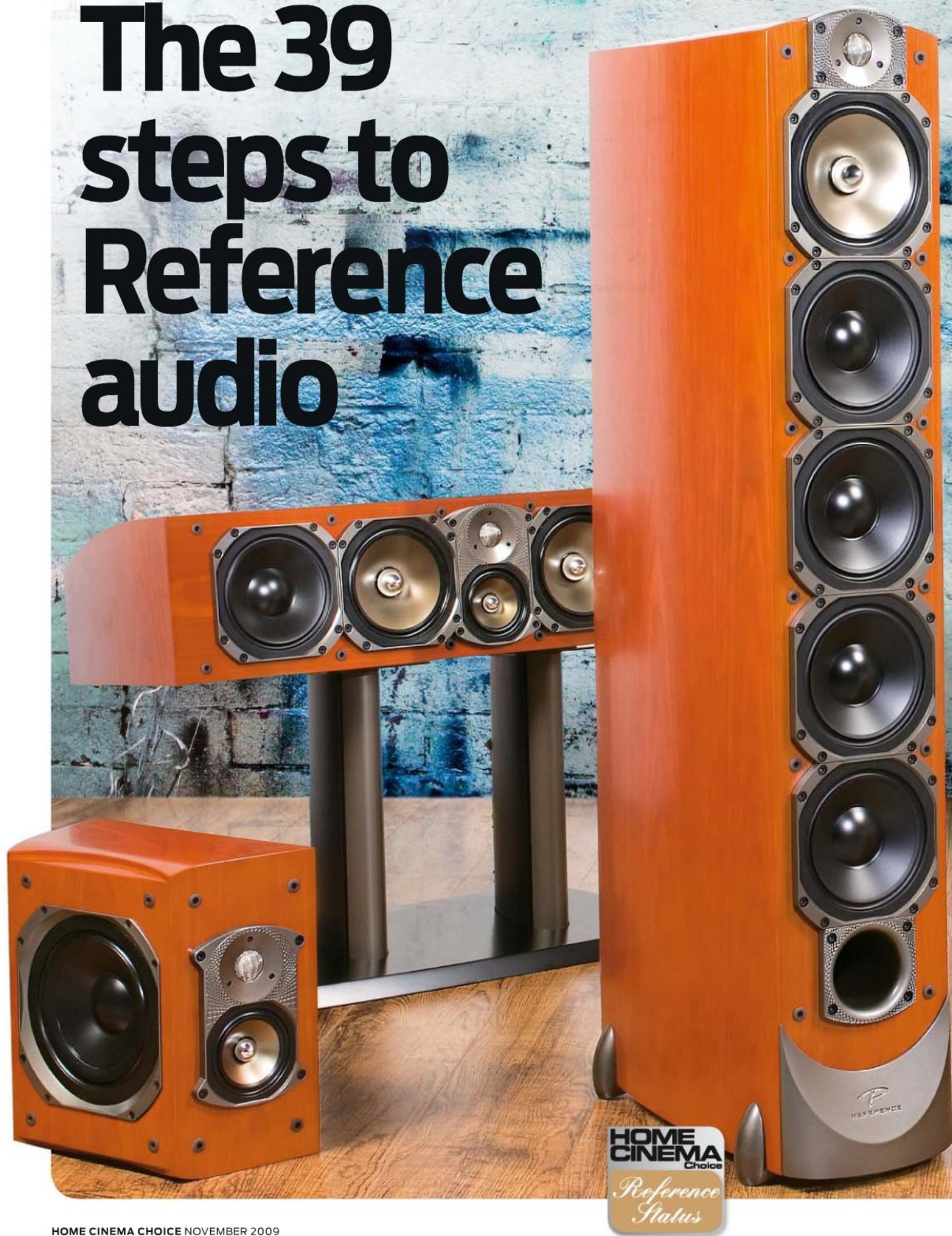
Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

The 39 steps to Reference audio



£20,000 they may be, but **Adam Rayner** reckons you get your money's worth with these Paradigm Reference speakers

Often teased for my childish tastes, I loved *Forrest Gump*. I've used it so many times in reviews that I can quote lumps of the script. A favourite moment in the happy simplicity that is Gump's life is when he earns a wad of cash for advertising a ping pong paddle and sighs, 'Well, that's ONE less thing to worry about...' It was just money.

If you share that attitude, and are looking for one of the most mindblowing home cinema surround systems available, then Paradigm's Reference Signature array might be for you.

A very sexy-looking and mature set of enclosures, this system is about might and power and huge amounts of detail and control. Also, I reckon it's amazing value for money. Sounds like an absurdity for twenty fat ones' worth of woodwork and bits that go in and out, but bear with me...

Guilty pleasure

I actually had guilt attacks during this review, it was so much fun. Because the Paradigm Reference cabinets are so big, I had to travel to see them. I sashayed in, put on figurative white >

The subwoofer's grille cannot be removed due to 'output' levels...



58 REVIEWS

silk gloves and sat on my capacious butt while the guys from distributors Anthem AV Solutions wrangled their source components to make them deliver the clips I fancied. Makes a change from lugging my own cabinets around.

I started with jazz vocalist Jane Monheit on a Dolby TrueHD demo disc. I was enraptured by this in a Pioneer demo room at the Sound and Vision show back in February, and been deeply disappointed by systems since. Then I got to listen to it on the £40,000 KEF Reference system and, despite the accompanying demo projector being utter pants by comparison, I once again experienced an extreme emotional reaction. That happened yet again with this Paradigm system. My mouth went dry, and, as Monheit's voice soared with that effortless god-given ease and beauty, and she wrinkled her cute nose, I experienced a tightening of the swonnicles...

Moving rapidly on, it was time for the inevitable viewing of *Lifted* from the *Ratatouille* Blu-ray disc. Regular readers will know I adore this and thus know it well. Or thought I did, for while I have enjoyed this 'toon on setups with such astonishing power that it made me duck when the poor abductee's head 'bonks' on the walls of his bedroom, this time I actually heard stuff I have never picked out before. For instance, the moment when the Boss alien relents and lets his little apprentice have a go at the abduction once more, the control stick actually *squeaks* as he turns it around.

Broadsword and rapier

So this system is about delicacy and detail as well as some real power. While it positively bristles with transducers (I don't think I have ever sat in front of so many drivers in that many boxes before) they are all working like the pistons in a Rolls Royce – under-stressed, easy life – so they can do what they do with ease and grace.

Looking at it, you might expect it to rip your face off its bones, like, say, a Cerwin Vega package. But you'd be wrong, as simply going loud is not really what it is about. Despite a monster 3,000W watts of oomph in the subwoofer, it is about headroom rather than sheer level. A lot like the Wilson Audio Maxx 2 speakers I found in the £Million cinema (HCC #169), yet for a massively lower price.

I was demo'd clips from *Kung Fu Panda* and the IMAX-filmed opening of *The Dark Knight*; in the latter the gunplay and crashing-buses-through-bank-fronts almost blew me away.

Lastly the tremendously stylish beginning of *Iron Man*. Never before have I heard the transition of AC/DC's *Back in Black* (from music used as background to open the film, to feature music playing on a ghetto blaster), so crisp or so in-your-face accurate. The dynamics were enormous, so when the bomb exploded in front of Tony Stark later on I really felt like it hit the room, as the headroom was so enormous.

The Sub 25 subwoofer marries a 15in driver to its three kilowatts of amplification. Elsewhere, under the grilles of the narrow-fronted but deep cabinets all around you, there are 38 other drivers – and they're all a bit special. The tweeters are madly high-end, using pure beryllium domes with neodymium magnets and ferrofluid in the gaps. The latter, a natty oily liquid containing tiny magnetic particles, increases the speakers power-handling via thermal conduction, ups the efficiency of the magnet/voice coil interface and provides some mechanical dampening to reduce distortion.

The mids all feature metal cones made of cobalt-infused aluminium. They again have neodymium magnets, and, very unusually for midrange drivers, are also ferrofluid-cooled and -damped. This is speaker-driver sexiness, believe me.

The 7in bass drivers are crafted from mineral-filled polypropylene – so a bit better than normal polyprop – and the cabinets are carefully ported, both front and back in the case of the S8 floorstander. The ADP3 surrounds, despite their along-the-wall design and singular front-firing bass unit, offer a fabulously directional output that really places the sounds around you when the designer wants to, rather than diffusing beyond any designer's ability to wrap you up.

Value for money

These Paradigm Reference cabinets are a wonderful slice of high-end audio, which compete for clarity with some speaker packages way more expensive, even if they won't to break bones like the bigger badder boys. So, even at £20K I actually think they're good value for your high-end pound, and worthy of an audition for any ambitious home cinema ●

AV/CV

Product:

Large scale luxury system with smart looks for the true enthusiast with taste

Position:

The best speakers that Paradigm makes, above its Studio and Millenia series

Peers:

Mordaunt-Short Performance 5.1; Bowers and Wilkins 800 series; Pioneer EX Series

The drivers use high-quality beryllium, neodymium and cobalt-infused aluminium

HCC VERDICT

Paradigm Reference Signature 7.1
£19,500 Approx

Price check: www.techradar.com/631184

Highs: Spades of detail in the high end; good weighty output; stupendous subwoofer

Lows: The design is a bit industrial

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5



→ Specifications

S8 towers

Drive Units: Six in total: four x 7in mineral-filled polypropylene cones with four-layer 38mm voice coils, 1 x 7in cobalt-infused aluminium midrange cone with solid phase plug through centre and Neodymium magnet; 1 x 1in Beryllium dome tweeter with rear-damping chamber and Neodymium magnet

Enclosure: Three-way front and rear ported

Frequency Response: 42Hz-45kHz

Sensitivity: 92dB (2.83V @ 1m)

Power Handling: 15-500W

Dimensions: 210(w)

x 1,232(h) x 521(d)mm

Weight: 45.35kg

C5 centre

Drive Units: 2 x 7in mineral-filled polypropylene cones with 38mm voice coils; 2 x 7in cobalt-infused aluminium midbass cones with solid phase plug through centre; 1 x 4in cobalt-infused aluminium midrange with solid phase plug through centre; 1 x 1in Beryllium dome tweeter with rear damping chamber and Neodymium magnet

Enclosure: 3.5-way ported

Frequency Response: 50Hz-45kHz

Sensitivity: 92dB (2.83V @ 1m)

Power Handling: 15-500W

Dimensions: 953(w) x 241(h)

x 444(d)mm

Weight: 36.7kg

ADP3 surrounds

Drive Units: Five in total; 1 x 8in mineral-filled polypropylene bass driver with two-layer 25mm voice coil; two 4in cobalt-infused aluminium mid-rangers with solid phase plugs through their centres; 2 x 1in Beryllium dome tweeters with rear damping chambers and Neodymium magnets

Enclosure: Three-way sealed

Frequency Response: 82Hz-45kHz

Sensitivity: 89dB (2.83V @ 1m)

Power Handling: 15-250W

Dimensions: 59(w) x 337(h)

x 191(d)mm

Weight: 11.8kg

Sub 25 subwoofer

Drive Unit: 15in dual spider design with mineral-filled copolymer polypropylene cone, 3in eight-layer voice coil and 16.8kg ceramic-ferrite magnet

Enclosure: Sealed

Frequency Response: DIN rated down to 9Hz

On board power: 3,000W RMS

Dimensions: 460(w) x 510(h)

x 550(d)mm

Weight: 51.7kg

Connections: Phono, USB and three-pin balanced XLR

→ **Specifications**

HD Ready: YES 1080p24

Component video: YES 1 input

HDMI: YES 2 x v1.3

PC input: YES 1 D-Sub 15-pin

Resolution: YES 1,920 x 1,080,

Brightness (claimed): YES 1,200 ANSI
lumens

Contrast ratio (claimed): YES 15,000:1

Dimensions:

530(w) x 577(H) x 199(d)mm

Weight: 17kg

Features: 3 x 0.6in LCoS panels;

576i/480i and 1080p HDMI

support; test-pattern generator;

x1.5 zoom (1.5:1-2.2:1) lens with

manual horizontal/vertical lens

shift; 250W UHP mercury lamp; 2

x 12V trigger outputs; multi-

standard analogue inputs (PAL/

NTSC/SECAM); backlit remote;

flexible adjustment memories

and gamma/colour-temperature

adjustment; iris control (10%

steps); HQV scaler; digital noise

reduction; multiple aspect ratios

(including 4:3, 16:9 and zoom);

2.35:1 (CinemaScope) 'bolt-on'

lens available as an option;

overscan; RS232 serial port



Of all the projectors on the market,
Cineversum's BlackWing is the most alluring

New kid on the LCoS block

Jump aside, JVC! Stand by, Sony! **Martin Pipe** meets another LCoS contender with some go-faster trim



Regular readers will be familiar with JVC and Sony's take on LCoS (Liquid Crystal on Silicon) projector technology – found in their D-ILA and SXRD-branded models, respectively – but French brand Cineversum and its own LCoS projectors have a much lower profile.

Perhaps that explains the curious, look-at-me styling of its BlackWing range, which has come courtesy of designer Antoine Béon – who has also worked with speaker brand Focal on some of its more outlandish-looking cabinets. Put it this way: it's not often a projector gets appreciative wolf-whistles from the goggled-eyed geeks in the HCC Tech Labs.

The question is, though, how does Cineversum's souped-up model compare to the PJs from the big Japanese brands, particularly the Sony VPL-VW85 reviewed elsewhere in this issue?

Lens flair

The big and beautiful BlackWing One employs three 1080p 0.7in LCoS panels. Yet this micro-display technology is only part of the PJ story – also key is the lens system. For the BlackWing One, Cineversum has specified its Ultimate Reference lens, a full-glass design with a 1.5–2.2:1 throw ratio. Compared to some projectors, the zoom is rather restricted – 1.5x. At a projection distance of 4m, I couldn't fill a 120in (diagonal) screen even with the lens at its end-stop. A key point, if your home cinema is smallish, but if room size is no object, you'll be happy that

AV/CV

Product:
Mid-range LCoS projector

Positioning:
The entry-level model of Cineversum's three strong range

Peers:
Sony VPL-VW85;
JVC DLA HD750

an 8.5m projection distance will reward you with a gargantuan 250in 16:9 picture.

Ring around the lens

Focusing and zoom on the BlackWing One are not motorised, but adjusted with concentric rings around the lens, and both are beautifully precise. Lens shift is also offered (+/- 60% vertical, +/- 30% horizontal), although this proved fiddly with the projector placed on my test platform as the relevant dials are tucked into the base.

Prospective buyers should note that a 2.35:1 anamorphic kit – the 'Theatre Concept' – is available. If most of your movies are in this format, this optional accessory is worth investigating. It's motorised, and can thus be easily switched into action.

With this in mind, two 12V triggers are featured. One can activate masking when a 2.35:1 film is shown on a 16:9 screen (or vice versa), while the other ensures that the outboard lens is enabled. If you're placing the BlackWing One on a table then you'll appreciate the adjustable feet, which let you compensate for wonky surfaces and line the picture up with the screen. Ceiling mounting (upside down) and rear-projection ('mirror image') are catered for in the setup menus. Digital keystone correction adjustment is also available.

Cineversum has paid attention to another key element of projector design – video processing. The BlackWing uses HQV tech, which you'll find embedded in high-end kit

from other manufacturers including Toshiba, Onkyo, Mitsubishi and Samsung. Furthermore, each BlackWing One projector is individually calibrated by one of Cineversum's engineers.

The onboard scaler gives you two HDMI (v1.3) inputs, both of which will accept 1080p24. The component will go up to 1080i, whilst for legacy SD sources you get composite and S-video. Large-screen PC gaming and home-theatre PC users can make use of a D-Sub/VGA input. Inputs can be selected via the backlit remote, or a control panel recessed into the rear – menu access is also possible from here.

The LCoS chipper, lens system, video processing and calibration all work together to deliver – or so it's claimed – a contrast ratio of 15,000:1, coupled with a 1,200 Lumen brightness. I'm also told by Cineversum that the picture quality is 'very natural' and 'CRT-like'. Well, it's good to see a manufacturer recognising that a derided 20th-century technology still has visual properties worth aspiring to.

Lens-shift apart, the BlackWing One gave me no setup hassles. An onboard pattern generator eases screen lineup and focusing/zoom. The comprehensive array of adjustments on offer will appeal to serious enthusiasts and the ISF calibration brigade alike. Independently-memorable for each input, they include three 'user' sets of colour-temperature adjustment (gain and bias for all three channels) and gamma curve, noise reduction, >



Wideboy:
Use one of the 12V triggers to operate Cineversum's optional 2.35:1 lens kit

a blue-only mode (for display calibration), black level, white level and overscan – as well as the usual aspect ratio, contrast, brightness, saturation and hue.

The lens aperture can also be adjusted in 10 per cent steps, improving contrast and black level at the loss of brightness. Particularly welcome is an information panel that tells you about the currently selected source (refresh rate, resolution and so on).

Fired up

Overall, the BlackWing One deals out some very credible imagery. Whether fed with standard-def interlaced video or 1080p/24 Blu-ray, **movement is silky-smooth and noticeably superior to bigscreen LCD and plasma displays** – such are the benefits of the LCoS micro-display technology. Then there's the colour reproduction, which can be stunning in its sheer depth.

Detail resolution is on the whole impressive. Boot up the *Transformers* Blu-ray, and you can almost read the computer displays in a wide-shot of the Pentagon Ops room.

With the BlackWing One, that movie's intricate Oscar-nominated effects-work dazzles, too. Now you can truly appreciate the care that the artists put into the design of those Autobots and Decepticons. DVDs, fed in at 576i and upscaled by the projector, put up a fight, although the drop in detail relative to hi-def is obvious. Despite this, even detail-rich movies like *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* are more than acceptable given the format's limitations – the sheen and

patterning of the *Nautilus* comes across very well, while the film's night-time recreations of late-Victorian London, Paris, and Venice, highlights the projector's ability to reveal what's in the shadows.

On the downside, the BlackWing One's black level is a tad disappointing – decent plasma screens usually yield a far closer approximation, as does its much-vaunted rival, the Sony VPL-VW85. (In fact, it's in this aspect where the Cineversum disappointed in our Tech Labs, delivering a very old-fashioned and unspectacular looking contrast measurement of just 2,668:1). Turning the iris down to its minimum 10 per cent setting and switching the lamp to its 'economic' (low power) mode does help considerably, but annoyingly, the reduction in brightness makes viewing in a light-proofed room mandatory.

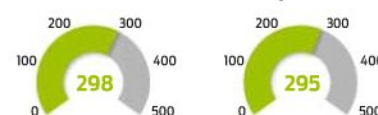
Also worth pointing out are the exceptionally low noise levels – visual noise, that is. The whirring of the cooling fan, despite Cineversum's claims, can be distracting in a smaller room after the PJ has been running a while. That said, the low-power lamp mode tames the latter.

Open and shut case

Black reproduction apart, the BlackWing One delivers the goods in picture quality. The range of features and adjustments is also impressive, while its take on LCoS projector casework design is not without designer charm. It makes for an interesting alternative to the immediate competition from Sony and JVC, and the option of a Cineversum-branded anamorphic lens may tip it in your favour.

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



White screen:
Even when fed a mute 100IRE white screen, power consumption is rather high

Test footage:
There's no significant difference from the White Screen tests; Economic mode cuts consumption to 245W

TV Contrast: ratio



Picture:
We're used to models failing to reach the heights of marketing spiel, though we expected a higher contrast measurement than 2,668:1; luminance, however is a relatively good 31,131fl

Colour accuracy



Presets: From a small range of presets, Medium gets closest to 6,500K, but the wide range of user adjustments deliver perfect results
Low: 5,441K
Medium: 6,332K
Medium high: 7,007K
High: 8,826K

HCC VERDICT

Cineversum BlackWing One
£4,000 Approx

Price check: www.techradar.com/630706

Highs: Natural picture reproduction with stunning detail and colour fidelity; flexible configuration; eye-catching design

Lows: Default settings favour brightness over realistic black levels; you'll need a big room

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5



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*Best Home Cinema Receiver 2009-2010
Denon AVR-1910*

XQuisite cinema sound

Jim Hill tests the latest KEF high-end speakers, and discovers a dispersive sound that's perfect for home theatre

AV/CV

Product:

Full-range 5.1 speaker system with three-way front towers

Position:

This is the premium configuration of KEF's flagship cinema speakers

Peers:

Acoustic Energy Radiance 5.1; Tannoy Signature Revolution 5.1

With 48 years of experience and dozens of Best Buy badges in the bag, KEF is already a much-revered loudspeaker brand in the world of home cinema. And having spent some quality time with its new XQ series, I can safely say that its rep will remain intact.

Some might argue that the XQs are KEF's most innovative speakers to date, and we've assembled here the most desirable configuration, with three-way towers at the front (XQ40s), two-way bookshelf speakers at the back (XQ20s), a remarkably highly-specified centre channel (XQ50c) and a 12in subwoofer (XQ60b). This setup will typically sell for around £5,000, but it's quite possible to build a more affordable system by choosing the slimmer tower speakers (XQ30s) and smaller rears (XQ10s) instead.

All six of the XQ siblings sport curved wooden cabinets without a right angle in sight. It might look flat in the picture, but try and balance a coffee cup on top of any of these boxes (as if you would) and it'll slide gracefully onto the floor. We've chosen the lustrous Piano Black lacquer finish, but Birdseye Maple and beautiful Khaya Mahogany real wood veneers are also available.

And crucially, they all use KEF's trademark Uni-Q driver array that



This 5.1 KEF array will provide enough grunt to fill all but the biggest cinema rooms



66 REVIEWS

puts the tweeter in the centre of the mid-bass driver. It's this arrangement that gives KEF speakers their effortlessly integrated sound, which is still apparent and even enhanced by the Tangerine waveguide of the XQs, which disperses the highest frequencies through a metal device that crowns each tweeter.

The tweeter itself now boasts a dynamic range wide enough to replace the odd-looking hyper-tweeters that KEF used to mount on top of its reference-quality cabinets.

Stand and deliver

The stars of the show are clearly the hulking XQ40 floorstanders, which stand chest-high on conical metal feet. Behind the magnetic grills are two paper cone drivers for the low frequencies and an aluminium Uni-Q driver for the high frequencies. This three-way arrangement promises a particularly wide dynamic range with the big enclosure enabling deep bass extension and the hypertweeter reaching the very high frequencies.

It looks like no expense has been spared on these statement speakers; tap the front bezel and you'll notice the whole front plate has been engineered from a single piece of aluminium with holes machined into it for the three drivers and two air ports. With the extra rigidity that this brings to the enclosure, combined with the absence of any parallel walls that could create unwanted internal standing waves, **these boxes can muster a truly rich and resonant bass.** You can further tune the cabinets to suit your room by stuffing one or both of the foam bungs into the front ports.

Even before unpacking the others, these two tower speakers were able to flood my listening room with their astonishing presence in stereo mode. Feed them a well-recorded vocal track like those of Air's *Moon Safari* album, close your eyes and you'll swear the singer is standing between the two XQ40s.

KEF has always maintained that the centre channel is the most important speaker in a surround package, and the XQ50c is as extravagantly manufactured as the front pair, with an aluminium bezel, acres of glossy black lacquer and a similar driver array. It's not small, though, so you can forget about wall-mounting. Instead you'll need a sturdy support of the right height to bring it into line with the XQ40s. A rubber mat is provided to lay it on top of the stand.

KEF's UniQ driver (top of the floorstander) helps deliver a wide, integrated soundstage





An extra £250 will get you the stands for the XQ20 rears

The substantial rears are of similarly heroic build, but reduced to stand-mountable proportions – KEF will flog you some suitable metal supports to go with them.

With its oval design, the XQ60b sub is an aesthetic match for the rest of the XQ series. Driving the 12in cone is a 200W amp. It looks deceptively simple, with just volume and phase control dials visible at the back and there's no remote control, but it'll turn itself off when there's no signal.

Despite their size, these big boxes are surprisingly accommodating. The XQ40s are sensitive at 90dB and easy to drive with a moderately powerful amplifier. My Marantz SR6003 had no trouble pushing all five speakers at quite inconsiderate volume levels. Yet as these KEFs have their ports facing forwards, they don't mind being pushed back against the walls if you need the space.

Aligning the front three is a little more critical because you'll want to maintain the XQ40's stereo imaging, while allowing the centre channel to deliver dialogue and centre stage noises as seamlessly as possible.

The centre unit has the same attention to detail and open mid-range as the main pair, so the front soundstage is unbroken and as clear as Evian. It doesn't have quite the bass extension, but an impressive dynamic range, and it doesn't take much tuning to get all of the front speakers filling your cinema in harmony.

The rear XQ20s would make a decent pair of hi-fi speakers, and in a 5.1 array they're more than adequate at filling in the rear soundstage and blending it with the front. And it's here that the Tangerine waveguide is particularly welcome, with the high

frequencies coming through diffuse and integrated.

Listen to the Watchmen

Together the XQs manage the ideal blend of deep bass, spacious mid band and treble. A neutral balance like this suits all genres of film, but that resonant low-end works particularly well with action flicks. Cue *Watchmen* on Blu-ray, and the graceful and beautifully dubbed fight scene in Chapter One. This gives the XQ speakers a chance to show just how much air they can shift between them. **There's plenty of crunching detail, but it's never harsh or brittle – just thumpingly accurate.** And the advantages of that weighty and precise centre channel come into play during these loud passages by delivering voices through the mix, so you never miss any dialogue.

Try a more tuneful soundtrack, like *Across the Universe* on Blu-ray, and the reworked Beatles tracks that pepper the film (sorry about the pun) are presented with real musicality. The fast, rhythmic bass and sweet treble gives the impression that these speakers were tuned with music in mind. In fact, this is when they impress the most. Playing a classical piece in surround sound (in this case Tchaikovsky's *Classics* from a DTS collection on DVD Audio) and the presence and scale of these loudspeakers is ideal for conveying the sound of a full orchestra.

Sonically, it's hard to fault with these gorgeous cabinets, because their natural tone is so universally appealing. I could complain about the lack of a remote control for the sub, or the option to tri-wire the front pair, but really, the XQ series are outstanding all-round performers ●

→ Specifications

XQ40 (fronts)

Drive Units: 2 x 6.5in LF units; 1 x 6.5in Uni-Q driver with 0.75in aluminium dome HF unit

Frequency Response: 45Hz–55kHz (+/-3dB)

Sensitivity: 90dB

Power Handling: 200W

Dimensions: 1,020(h) x 231(w) x 302(d)mm

Weight: 24.3kg

XQ20 (surrounds)

Drive Units: 1 x 6.5in Uni-Q with 0.75in aluminium dome HF unit

Frequency Response: 52Hz–55kHz (+/-3dB)

Sensitivity: 88dB

Power Handling: 120W

Dimensions: 385(h) x 231(w) x 302(d)mm

Weight: 9.2kg

XQ50c (centre)

Drive Units: 2 x 5.25in LF units, 1 x 5.25in Uni-Q with 0.75in aluminium dome HF unit

Frequency Response: 65Hz–55kHz (+/-3dB)

Sensitivity: 86dB

Power Handling: 150W

Dimensions: 205(h) x 475(w) x 247(d)mm

Weight: 10.3kg

XQ60b (subwoofer)

Drive Units: 1 x 12in long-throw LF unit

Frequency Range: 26–140Hz

Amplifier: 200W Class D

Dimensions: 444(h) x 587(w) x 415(d)mm

Weight: 21.4kg

Features: Line and speaker level inputs; adjustable phase and low pass cut-off frequency; 3 position adjustable EQ



HCC VERDICT

KEF XQ 5.1 system
£5,000 Approx

Price check: www.techradar.com/629165

Highs: Powerful projection; detail and clarity; wide dynamic range from the front three

Lows: Needs a large room; no remote control for the sub

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Super Blu days for LG

Blu-ray decks are getting cheaper, while their innards are becoming more elaborate. **Rik Henderson** falls in love with LG's BD390



Everybody has sympathy for Toshiba over HD DVD, but few have shed a tear for LG. Let's not forget that the plucky South Korean giant put its heart, s(e)oul and more than a few shekels into the Super Multi Blue idea, with combination Blu-ray/HD DVD PC drives and dedicated players. At the time the company didn't just hedge its bets, it positively, er, rainforested them. And maybe it could have worked, had Warner not made the fateful decision to stop supporting both formats almost two years ago.

A dual HD deck, you see, was a highly attractive proposition, and LG

would've been King of the Hill had it all panned out. Instead, as a result, the manufacturer has taken longer to get out of the blocks with dedicated Blu-ray spinners than rivals such as Sony, Panasonic and near neighbours Samsung. It took a fair while to even sing from the same hymn sheet, and as good as the BD370 was (reviewed in *HCC* #170) it was still a catch-up deck, offering essentially the same features the others have been touting for months.

However, the BD390 is here, and it's taking on all comers. In fact, LG is now setting its stall a step further ahead of some of the rest of

AV/CV

Product: Prof. 2.0 Blu-ray player with DLNA, wi-fi, and 1GB internal memory

Positioning: The successor to LG's BD370

Peers: Panasonic DMP-BD80; Sony BDP-S360; Samsung BD-P4600

the BD field too. This machine isn't just a Blu-ray player, it's an entertainment centre, and a showpiece for innovation.

Familiar feel

Well, except in the design stakes. Indeed, if plagiarism is the sincerest form of flattery, Sony should be blushing for months. The BD390 looks almost exactly like Sony's year-old BDP-S550. That's not exactly a bad thing, as the blue-mirrored fascia of the Japanese model was one of its highlights, but I've been to LG's Design Centre and, as far as I could see, they had



→ Specifications

Video upscaling: YES up to 1080p
Multiregion: NO Region B (BD); R2 (DVD)

HDMI: YES v1.3a

Component: YES Blu-ray playback up to 1080i

Multichannel phono audio: YES a full set of 7.1 analogue outputs

Digital audio: YES Coaxial and optical outs

SACD/DVD-A playback: NO But you wouldn't expect them here

Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: YES/YES

Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream: YES/YES

Profile 2.0: YES with full BD-Live compatibility

Dimensions: 430(w) x 58(h) x 277(d)mm

Weight: 3kg

Features: USB 2.0 port; AVCHD, DivX HD, MKV, XviD, MPEG, VOB, MP3, WMA, JPEG, PNG playback; Ethernet port; YouTube portal; DLNA-certification; Nero MediaHome (for PC – to set up sharing); wi-fi (802.11b/g/n)



Phono fun:

The inclusion of 7.1 phono outputs means the BD390 is compatible with older AV receivers

drawing boards, paper and pencils... I think you get what I'm saying.

The rear view also offers little in the way of surprises, although there is the welcome presence of a set of 7.1 analogue audio outputs. While the deck is capable of decoding and bitstreaming Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD Master Audio soundtracks through HDMI (and downmixing to pass-through optical), this means the LG can feed an older amplifier with high-resolution coughs and burps. It may also come in handy if, like me, you've completely filled your HDMI quota with a host of other toys and gadgets.

The LG BD390 hides a USB 2.0 port on the front under a weird

mini-flap. It's for media-playing purposes, and that's its only role. Unlike some BD decks, this player doesn't need a memory stick for storing BD-Live content and profiles – it has 1GB of internal storage.

The polite thing to say about BD-Live is that it's 'still in its infancy as a concept'. What that really means is that it's mostly a load of crap. However, **while some of us couldn't care less about downloadable trailers, extra commentary tracks and the like**, to say that you're not bothered if your player doesn't do it correctly, is like saying that you're not bothered if your car doesn't have air conditioning – most of the time you don't even notice, but there will be the occasional scorcher (such as the US Director's Cut edition of *Watchmen*) where you'll be pining for the choice. And, with its internal storage, that's exactly

what this sub-£300 deck offers. It's hassle-free and there if you need it. You can't argue with that.

Wireless

Also lurking on the LG's specs is wi-fi, another technology that will help with BD-Live and much more besides. And there's no wireless dongle needed here – unlike Samsung's BD-P3600

reviewed on p84, the BD390 has its capabilities hidden within.

The receiver is compliant with the higher bandwidth specification of 802.11n (as well as 802.11b/g). This means that, should you have a suitable wireless router, not only can you access such features as the aforementioned BD-Live, YouTube and firmware updates with the same speed as a wired LAN connection, but you can also stream HD video from a PC.

This deck also comes with full DLNA (Digital Living Network Alliance) certification, and it's got the badge to prove it. In essence, it can stream music, pictures and video stored on a computer or NAS drive straight to your screen. And thanks to the 'n' part of the 802.11n compatibility, it does so smoothly and extremely quickly (at the touch of a button). Generally, any lag is down to the speed of your PC. DLNA-compliance isn't exactly new to a Blu-ray player – a Pioneer BD deck offered a basic form of the technology for music streaming, and the PlayStation 3 has been doing it since its launch – but it's the sheer wealth of file types that the BD390 recognises that astounds.

Like with its predecessor, this deck can play MKV files. These are, essentially, but not exclusively, files that combine both high-definition video and 5.1 audio into one simply-designated lump. You're most likely to come across them if you are sailing the choppy waters of the Torrent websites, as they are the file-type commonly associated with Blu-ray movie rips and 720p-encoded episodes of American TV shows. However, the BD370

Blu-rays that'll blow you away

Ten cracking discs that show what the HD format is all about...

Watchmen: The Director's Cut → All-Region (US Import)

Bigger and better cut of the world's smartest superhero film with superb interactive extras

Battlestar Galactica: The Complete Series → All-Region

The incredible sci-fi series becomes a spectacular Blu-ray smash with this feature-packed 20-disc set

Iron Man → All-Region

High-octane action and breathtaking special effects are the order of the day in this superheroic AV powerhouse

Sin City → All-Region

With its crisp black-and-white imagery and inventive extras, this two-disc set is so good it must be a sin

Blade Runner: 5-Disc CE → All-Region (US Import)

Not one, not two, but five different cuts of Ridley Scott's sci-fi classic in gorgeous remastered HD, plus some incredible extras

Wall-E → Region B

Pixar's freshest and funniest film in years boasts hi-def visuals and lossless audio that will blow your mind

Casino Royale: Deluxe Edition → All-Region

Packed with more features than 007's car, this two-disc set is a must-have for all hi-def action fans

The Godfather Trilogy → All-Region

Coppola's epic crime saga beautifully remastered in 1080p and accompanied by essential supplementary features

300: The Complete Experience → All-Region (US Import)

Zack Snyder's historical hack 'n' slash flick returns to Blu-ray with the most comprehensive set of extras imaginable

Sleeping Beauty: Platinum Edition → Region B

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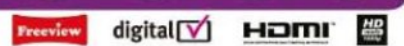
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LG's BD390 has multimedia aspirations beyond Blu-ray



Blu-ray You say...

Stephen Lightfoot:

I only want two things from a Blu-ray player; the very best picture and sound you can elicit from a disc. Oh, and quick loading times would be a bonus. I have no interest in connecting it to the web, I have a computer for that, and to be honest I very rarely watch any extras.

Kåre Wenger:

I want high quality audio and picture. Good build quality. Fast and smooth operation. Resume function on all BD discs. Multiformat playback DVD-A and SACD. LAN, YouTube and DivX is not important.

Alan Smithee:

I'd like to see onboard wireless as standard (it's annoying have to run a cable), and onboard memory. It seems insane this isn't standard. I really shouldn't have to stick a USB Stick in, just to get BD Live to work.

machine could only play them if they were on a USB stick or on a recordable DVD, with the former being restricted in filesize and the latter sometimes refusing to work, depending on the video itself.

The BD390 though, can play them through the ether (wired or wireless), straight from the computer they were downloaded onto, or created on. Indeed, legality-aside (because it's a grey area at present) you could rip your own Blu-rays to a suitably large hard drive or NAS box and play them in the living room through the LG without leaving your seat – like an HD video jukebox. Superb.

And that's not all. You might even decide to use a different file-type for quality or size. This deck can recognise other HD codecs, such as VOB (MPEG) and AVCHD. It even carries full DivX HD certification. Robert Baden Powell didn't have this many badges.

And the LG plays these HD codecs with aplomb. Despite most being encoded at 720p rather than 1080p, the replay quality is excellent. Even when stretched to fill a 55in LCD TV, crispness and fine detail holds up. Standard DivX and XviD fare is a lot softer, but that's entirely the codec itself. Essentially, no matter the resolution, the LG displays the source video exactly as created, sometimes warts and all.

Testing times

Of course, Blu-ray-playing prowess shouldn't be forgotten amongst all my fawning over the feature-list. DLNA-certification and wi-fi aside, it'd be a sorry state of affairs should the BD390's capabilities to spin a BD movie be hampered.

Thankfully, they aren't. I'm not one to entirely trust subjective viewpoints alone, which is why I always test a

player with a range of discs, including the Silicon Optix HD HQV Benchmark Blu-ray, and PAL DVD for upscaling purposes, and this deck passed every single test on both discs. That's impressive for a sub-£300 machine, and equates to both generally excellent-looking HD and SD video. To put a more real-world spin on it, I also fed the BD390 with the US *Watchmen Director's Cut* BD, and was agog at the expansive details in the shadows (it's a very dark movie in more than one sense), the filmic levels of detail, and the vibrancy and depth of the characters' crime-fighting togs. I'm sold.

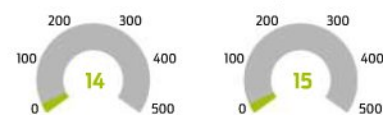
The player is also impressive with loading times, and pips the Samsung BD-P3600 by a few seconds. In fact I would say that it is as speedy loading a Blu-ray disc as the PlayStation 3 (the original one), even a title that's Java-heavy. There also didn't seem to be a time difference between BD and DVD on load up.

If there's one element of the BD390 that's not got quite the same wow factor as just about every other aspect of this machine, it's the audio performance. It's good, but not spectacular. For the price, it's more than adequate, and those without experience of high-end audio DACs at work will be impressed enough by a Dolby TrueHD or DTS-HD MA track. But this is an area that would be worth more investment if, say, you built your own home cinema.

Other than that, I am extremely impressed with this player. Indeed, I'd go as far to say that this is the best Blu-ray deck I've encountered yet. I can't fault its video performance at all, and its feature count is astonishing. If you're looking to create a high-definition entertainment hub in your living room, this is it ●

→ Tech Labs

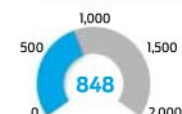
Power consumption: Watts



Idling: Quite low for this class of machine, though, as always, turn it off fully to save your electric bill

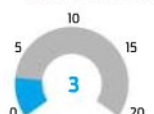
Playing: Very little extra power consumption while playing puts it in an eco-friendly bracket

Audio Jitter: Ps



Analogue: An unspectacular figure which doesn't suggest outstanding analogue audio performance. Higher-end BD decks from Pioneer and Sony test much lower

Video Jitter: Ns



Vision: This video jitter figure is better, suggesting high-quality components and video processing functions

Loading: Boot/Java

Boot speed & tray eject

4s

Tray in to main BD menu

45s

Disc loading & Java:

Boots up extremely quickly, one of the fastest on the market



HCC VERDICT

LG BD390

£290 Approx

Price check: www.techradar.com/631706

Highs: Superb feature list; wireless HD video streaming; excellent video performance

Lows: Audio only reasonable; unoriginal, if nice, design

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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Chord Company - showing several new cables.

Denon - new hi-fi stereo separates, a new two-piece mini system as well as a full line up of AV models for 2009-10.

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NAD - see the new stereo amplifiers.

Onkyo - see the full line up of home cinema receivers.

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Sonos - see the new CR200 touch screen controller.

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Grand designs

NAD's T747 is looking to claim a chunk of the £1,000 AV receiver market.

Richard Stevenson thinks it might succeed



NAD has an enviable reputation for delivering superb value for money, especially when performance is a priority. Not actually my words, but NAD's. The claim heads up the T747 product overview and, try as I might, I simply can't disagree. Over the years, decades in fact, the company has consistently delivered solid-performing products that have generally sacrificed bells

and whistles in favour of better performance for your hard-earned, or benefit-thieved, pound.

But hold the phone! Have you seen the features list of the new T747? It has got auto-set-up with a supplied mic, two remote controls, multizone support, an onscreen GUI, a 1080p video upscaler and a data-dock connection for an iPod – and I've only stopped there

Makeover:

NAD has added some gentle curves to its AVR design

because I ran out of breath. Add-in a comprehensive suite of IR repeaters, 12V triggers, an RS232 port, ample AV sockets and 4-in-1-out v1.3 HDMI's, and top it off with decoding for all our favourite Dolby and DTS HD audio codecs and NAD's own matrix surround sound format, EARS. Ah, makes me chuckle every time.

The 747 has also had a bit of a makeover. Compared to previous



The T747 delivers a lush, addictive sound

NAD receivers, the new properly-black and neatly-curved fascia with blue display elevates it to simply 'plain' – up from butt-ugly. It is not yet mixing it with the likes of Harman Kardon or Pioneer in the style stakes, but **lessons learnt from the success of the rather funky Viso components are certainly beginning to show through**. Even the remote is topped with a gloss black panel reminiscent of current Samsung TV and BD deck handsets.

Okay, it's missing a few optical digital inputs, the terminals are a bit on the budget side of solid and there is no Ethernet port for networking. But we're talking about a sub-£1,000 receiver here.

Signal failure

This NAD also comes with an optional trump card – a DAB radio module. A £150 premium on top of the base-line model gets you the DB1 DAB module or, for stateside NAD owners, an XM satellite radio tuner. Whether the DAB tuner is any good is

a mystery to me as a decent signal hasn't made it to the South Coast yet – so as most of Sussex and Kent still regard FM and Nicam stereo as 'new-fangled', I do rather miss the net-connection for web radio.

There is a lot going on inside and outside of the NAD for the money, so where's the catch? Has the brand given up on its less-is-more performance-first philosophy and gone all 'gadgety'? I severely hope not, because it will get its corporate backside wipped by Onkyo at this price point.

Predictably, NAD has taken a very modest view of its power output. A mere 7 x 60W is the claimed output, which implies the T747 has all the raw industrial machismo of an energy-saving lightbulb. This rating is buried within a veritable spreadsheet of power figures proclaimed at different impedances, frequencies and phases of the moon. More reassuringly, our Tech Labs measured the output at 5 x 141W, and having lived with the T747 for a week, I can safely say

the power will be 'more than enough' for most people.

Clunky

The T747's set-up is straightforward – or would have been had the review sample had the correct remote control supplied. Yet even using the fascia buttons alone the receiver is up and running in a jiffy compared to, well, pretty much every other £1,000 receiver on the market. On the downside, the onscreen display is more of a colourful menu rather than the photo-realistic GUI's glamping up the competition, and some of the settings are rather coarse. For example, speaker distance can only be adjusted in 0.3m/1ft increments (many AVRs now go to 1cm) and the relative channel level is adjusted in chunky 1dB steps – the Denons and Pioneers at this price by a factor of 10. Oh, and the auto-set up got the subwoofer level so wrong I lost two fillings to the THX logo clip.

It doesn't really matter, though. The NAD is so easy to adjust that it's almost as quick to set it up manually >

AV/CV

Product:
A NAD receiver with gadgets – whatever next!

Position:
Near the bottom of NAD's seven-strong dedicated AVR range

Peers:
Denon AVR-3310;
Marantz SR-7002;
Pioneer VSX-LX52



→ Specifications

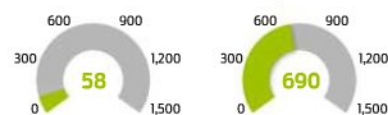
Dolby Digital TrueHD: YES plus Digital, Digital Plus and Pro Logic II/IIx
DTS-HD Master Audio: YES plus DTS, DTS-HD High Resolution, Neo:6
THX: NO No badge snobs here
Multichannel audio: YES 7 x 60W amplifiers
Multichannel input: YES 7.1 phono
Multiroom: YES main plus one zone
AV inputs: YES 6 x S-video & composite; 4 x digital audio (2 x coaxial, 2 x optical)
HDMI input/output: YES 4-in, 1-out (v1.3a)
Video upscaling: YES to 1080p
Component: YES 3-in, 1-out
Dimensions: 435(w) x 394(d) x 167(h)mm
Weight: 16.2kg
Features: AM/FM tuner; optional DAB module; onscreen GUI; EARS DSP mode; Dolby Virtual Surround; 2 IR Inputs; 1 IR Output, 12V triggers; two remotes, RS232 interface; Data Port for use with optional NAD Dock for iPod





→ Tech Labs

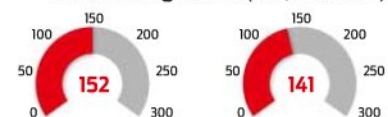
Power consumption: Watts



Idling: Not an enormous consumption considering the spec, but you wouldn't want to leave it on standby

Powered: Considering the output in five-channel mode, this indicates a high level of efficiency

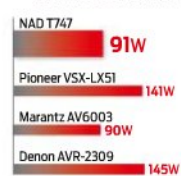
Power ratings: Watts (8Ω, 0.5% THD)



2-channel 8Ω: Performs well over spec whether you look at the quoted 7 x 60W Simultaneous Disclosure Power figure or 7 x 120W Minimum Continuous Power

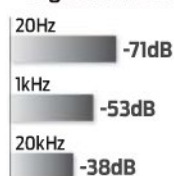
5-channel 8Ω: The five-channel performance of this model is a very healthy 141W. There's no shortage of juice.

Untainted: Watts



Fidelity firewall: Our measurement of power achieved before distortion becomes unacceptable. The 91W figure is better than the paper spec might lead you to believe

Signal/noise: dB



S/N tests:

Signal-to-noise tests suggest good results in the low and mid bands, with average figures for high-frequency bands

Connect four:

For a £1,000 AVR, four HDMI inputs is par for the course

and the sound is lush and addictive. Playing the Blu-ray release of *Monster's Inc*, the T747 rises easily to the challenge of the various vocal tones and the incredible array of different set ambiances. Listen to Mike and Sulley's dialogue in the hangar and you feel every bit of the vast space, with the NAD creating accurate reverb and echo effects that nail the spatial sensation. Yet switch to a bedroom scene (no, not one of those bedroom scenes...) and you can all but feel the duvet and furniture damping their voices. This accuracy and detail is not uncommon among receivers of this price point, but the T747 manages to illicit the effect with such ease.

Nor is it simply too safe for its own good. As the tempo rises NAD's receiver picks up the pace nicely, adding a little more of everything across the board. Bass gets deeper and faster, the top-end projects further and the soundstage expands to create an even more impressive action vista. It's not an AVR that will have you 'oohing' and 'ahhhing' over any one particular facet of its presentation – or perhaps seeking out action-clips for the sake of it – but you won't find anything to point a critical finger at either!

Watts the story?

Push up the volume and you will begin to wonder just where every other manufacturers' Watts are going to. With ample clockwise action on the volume knob the sound simply grows in stature without getting harsh or changing balance

– a common trait in less powerful amps. With large, efficient floor-standing speakers it managed a 100dB (A-WTD average) in-room output with enviable grace, and turned the comic chase scenes in *Bolt* into sequences worthy of *Bullit*.

Well, almost. The T747 is every bit as punchy and dynamic as the £1,000 competition, but I discerned a limited maximum SPL. Simply put, the NAD will not go as maxed-out loud as some of its peers, but it does get to medium-serious listening volumes a whole lot more gracefully than many of them.

Will the slightly limited max SPL matter to most people? Probably not – unless you are blessed with stone-deaf neighbours. **What the NAD offers instead is an unflappable solidity** and cast-iron guarantee that no matter what you throw at it, it will continue to sound great. A week's listening encompassed a broad brush of Blu-rays – *ZZ Top Live in Texas*, *Monty Python's Life of Brian*, *Milk* and *Lesbian Vampire Killers* – and the NAD disappeared into the movie-watching experience every time.

The T747 is a capable all-rounder that lulls you with its easy-going style and by being pretty darn good at everything. Denon's equivalent has more chutzpah, Pioneer's more detail and Onkyo's perhaps more refinement, but the T747's simplicity, solidity and consistent performance keeps NAD's reputation for quality and value thoroughly intact. In all, a worthy upgrade for existing NAD faithful ●



HCC VERDICT

NAD T747
£1,000 Approx

Price check: www.techradar.com/629727

Highs: Storming all-round performance; eases you into every film; simple to use

Lows: No Ethernet or USB inputs; DAB costs extra; shortage of Watts for real grunt

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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Juke in a box

Martin Pipe tries out the Mini, Kaleidescape's entry-level movie server



→ Specifications

Multi-region: NO but you can change the region four times before it locks
SACD/DVD-A: NO/NO
Component output: YES to 1080i (but DVD playback standard-def only)
HDMI: YES 1 output, v1.3
Upscaling: DVD only, up to 1080p
Dimensions: 451(w) x 83(h) x 438(d)mm
Weight: 9.75kg
Also featuring: CD/DVD drive for importing/playing media; intuitive user interface; 2 independent audio zones; 10bit 4:4:4 video processing; self-installable; Ethernet port; support for up to four additional 500GB drives

You can build your own multimedia jukebox with inexpensive bits and pieces, but none have yet matched the usability of Kaleidescape's server/player systems. No arcane gobbledegeek here – selecting a movie, song or complete album involves a system so intuitive even *Big Brother* contestants could use it.

Among the metadata added by Kaleidescape are photos, cover art, title information and even reviews. CDs and DVDs are imported from the disc 'as-is' without compression. **All menus and extras are retained, too**, although you can jump straight to a movie. Exactly the same 'Kaleidescape Experience' underpins the brand's new entry-level product – the Mini – which contains both server and player in a solidly-built and tastefully backlit unit.

Behind the Mini's front-panel drawbridge, you'll find a CD/DVD drive for importing or playing files. In this lowered state, the four drive bays are visible. Depending on configuration, up to 225 DVDs, 2500 CDs or a mix of the two can be accommodated. Based around 2.5in drives, the onboard server employs Kaleidescape's proprietary RAID-K technology. If a drive fails, your collection need not be lost.

The Mini gives you the same AV connectivity options as the existing players, plus two independent audio zones. It can integrate with other Minis, players or Kaleidescape servers on your home network. Support for hi-def is minimal – no Blu-ray, for example. A hi-def demo film

showcases its readiness for such formats, though, and looked very good indeed on Cineversum's BlackWing 1 projector.

As did DVDs, with the caveat that all of my sample's pre-installed movies were R1/NTSC – and thus subject to the very slight motion judder introduced by the pull-down process. To be fair, little difference could be seen after I used the web interface to switch the HDMI output to 480i (thereby using the projector's own processing). This suggests the Mini's own video processing is to up to home cinema standards.

Plays for sure

In other respects, you get a wide contrast range allied to crisp detail and natural colour rendition – the presentation is akin to that of a high-end DVD player. Playback, both 'off-the-disc' and imported, of a PAL DVD proved excellent. And audio? Again, this was up to scratch. As expected, 5.1 movie soundtracks retained all the vigour of the DVD originals. CDs, auditioned via a stereo output, also fared well: I compared a Led Zep installed album on the Mini with my own CD, played via an Arcam deck. Any differences between the two were minimal.

The Kaleidescape Mini is a unique proposition. It's expensive, but far more affordable than the company's previous products. It can work on a self-contained basis, and can be installed in minutes. The server concept means you spend less time looking for movies or music, and more time enjoying them ●

AV/CV

Product: Self-contained hard-drive based CD/DVD jukebox

Positioning: Kaleidescape's entry-level option

Peers: Nothing, really...

→ Tech Labs

The Mini's 'region' can be changed up to four times via the 'Installer Web Utility', accessible from a PC connected to your home network. If you've got a collection of R1 DVDs, you could change the region and import them one at a time before changing back to R2. Kaleidescape told *HCC* that some particularly well-heeled customers choose to purchase two players (or two Minis), one of which would be set to Region 2 and the other to Region 1. The Installer Web Utility provides different video processing settings for NTSC and PAL playback, so you'll get the best possible results from both types of material. For example, NTSC can be upscaled to 1080p/60 (with interlacing that employs 3:2 pulldown correction) while PAL is upscaled to 1080p/50 (no such pulldown correction necessary)



HCC VERDICT

Kaleidescape Mini
 £7,700 Approx

Price check: www.techradar.com/629073

Highs: Unprecedented ease of use; top-flight performance

Lows: Bare minimum of support for hi-def media; no support for TV (other than DVD releases)

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5



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The stylish build elevates this Freesat receiver above many of its rivals



Freesat unlocked

TechniSat's receiver adds networking and European TV to the Freesat HD party. **Martin Pipe** revels in this Teutonic treasure



For those without reliable access to digital terrestrial TV, Freesat HD is the obvious choice if a satellite dish is an option but you don't want Sky. Some TV sets have Freesat HD tuners built-in, but if you've already got a decent display, a set-top box will fit your bill.

As far as these go, the quality choice has long been Humax's Foxsat-HD, but now there's another option. You might not have heard of TechniSat, but in the satellite TV field this German brand is equally-revered.

TechniSat's HDFS differs from Humax's by building in some novel

features. For starters, this elegant machine can – with appropriate setup – be used to receive non-Freesat channels. Indeed, it will drive a DiSEqC switchbox or motorised dish, and thereby opening up the world of European satellite telly. However, the setup menu needed to achieve this isn't 'hidden' from users – Humax, take heed!

Then there's its onboard multimedia playback facilities. Lower the unit's front-panel drawbridge, and you'll see a USB socket and a pair of card readers. Between them, these slots cater for Compact Flash,

Plug n play: Below the front flap you'll find a USB socket and two media card readers

MemoryStick and SD/MMC. As well as JPEGs, the HDFS will play MPEG-2 video and MP3 audio stored on such cards, or FAT32-formatted USB devices like solid-state memory or hard drives. Not DivX, though.

All Freesat receivers, HD or otherwise, have an Ethernet port. Currently, it's unused for Freesat apps although it should soon let BBC's iPlayer be unleashed on your TV. With the HDFS, though, you're not at Freesat's whim. Connect it to a network, and it'll access compatible content from shared PC folders. A £30 wi-fi dongle is



→ Specifications

HDD/PVR: NO No timeshifting here

DVB tuner: YES, DVB-S and DVB-S2

(Freesat HD compliant)

Upscaling: YES to 1080i HDMI: YES

Scart: YES 2 (1 RGB))

USB: YES front and rear

Component output: NO

Stereo phono output: YES

Digital audio output: YES optical and

coaxial x

Dimensions:

305(w) x 50(h) x 200(d)mm

Weight: 1.56kg

Features: Ethernet; Freesat HD EPG;

30 channel-change/start-up/

recording timer events

programmable manually or via

EPG; USB; CompactFlash and

MemoryStick/MMC/SD card

readers; JPEG/MP3/MPEG-2/

MPEG-2 TS playback from

network or storage device; picture

freeze; wi-fi adaptor available;

can receive non-Freesat channels

available if stringing up Ethernet cables isn't your idea of fun.

As a Freesat HD receiver the HDFS is difficult to fault.

An auto-install wizard takes you through the process of configuring the receiver – aerial setting, firmware updates, AV output, postcode entry and channel searching. The latter is fast, and new scans are easily invoked from the simple and well-designed menu system. From here, you can also switch to the non-Freesat ('TechniSat') mode, configure Ethernet/wi-fi, change parental-control parameters and access the media player.

There are three timer variants. One wakes up the receiver, another switches channels at a specified time and the third is provided for recording purposes – it's intended for use with external Scart-fed recorders. All timers can be programmed from the slick EPG, or manually. Automatic recording of complete series isn't allowed for, unless the programme is broadcast at the same time daily or weekly.

As with other Freesat-HD kit, a 'genre' view enables you to home in on channels and programmes.

AV/CV

Product:

Freesat HD receiver with multimedia playback and potential to receive extra services

Position:

TechniSat's debut Freesat receiver

Peers:

Humax Foxsat-HD; Metronic Sat HD100; Grundig GUFSA01HD

You also get the ability to access a wide selection of radio stations – most of which sound better than DAB. For best results, connect the digital audio output – which will also take Dolby Digital soundtracks off HD channels – to your AV system. Bitstreams are available via HDMI.

Crisp delivery

Feeding a Samsung LCD TV with an HDMI signal – the top option here is 1080i for hi-def and upscaled standard-def – brought delicious pics from BBC HD and ITV HD.

The sheer finery of textures really stood out, as did the sense of depth and true-to-life realisation of colour. A head-to-head comparison with BBC HD on Sky proved the TechniSat's capabilities. The accompanying audio was fine, too. I didn't spot any lip-sync issues, and if you do, a menu-driven AV sync feature will compensate for video processing delays.

However, the HD performance, coupled with the revealing nature of the Samsung TV, demonstrated just how poor quality many

standard-def channels are; distinctly soft and littered with artefacts. This isn't TechniSat's fault – they look just as ropey on Sky. MPEG DVD rips played over my network via wi-fi looked much better, although with Ethernet they tended to stutter. Odd.

Conclusion

Moving your dish around to get Euro telly isn't everyone's bag, and neither is multimedia playback. Even so, TechniSat's HDFS is a superb Freesat HD receiver – and a must-have for PC users, home networkers and Italian soap opera fans. I can't wait for the planned USB PVR upgrade ●

HCC VERDICT

TechniSat HDFS

£190 Approx

Price check: www.techradar.com/629186

Highs: Solid AV quality; goes one step further than conventional Freesat hardware

Lows: Simultaneous RGB Scart/HDMI impossible

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Wireless:

Shell out an extra £30 for wi-fi



PS3 Slim ups the ante

The slimline console has new tricks up its sleeve. **Steve May** is seduced



→ Specifications

Upscaling: YES to 1080p
 Multiregion: NO R2 DVD; RB Blu-ray
 HDMI: YES 1 x v1.3
 Component: NO Not on this console
 Phono audio outputs: YES but only via proprietary AV Multi Out
 Digital audio outputs: YES 1 x optical
 SACD/DVD-A playback: NO
 Dimensions: 290(w) x 65(h) x 290(d)mm
 Weight: 3.2kg
 Features: 2 x USB 2.0 jacks; Ethernet connection; 120GB HDD; wireless controller; wi-fi; plays games, too

There's little doubt that the PS3 Slim is an enticing prospect. Significantly smaller than the original, with an enlarged 120GB hard drive, trendy new matt cabinet finish and more digestible price tag, it puts Sony squarely back in the game.

But just how good is it as a Blu-ray player? Does it offer a step-up in AV performance over the original, and should existing PS3 owners rush to part-exchange their old consoles for this year's svelte model?

Listen up

First up, noise. The original PS3 was significantly quieter than its Microsoft rival when it came to operational clicks and whirrs – while the Xbox 360 sounded like a hyperactive vacuum cleaner, the PS3 maintained a dignified hum. This model, at least initially, is quieter still, although heat builds up quickly during use and the fan noise accelerates accordingly. Midway through *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*, I noted that the console was disgorging a lot of heat through its rear vents, and at that point, in terms of fan noise it didn't strike me as a significant improvement on what's gone before.

In terms of absolute performance, it's also not as assured as the original. While the console can spin CDs, it's no replacement for a CD player. The original was surprisingly good in this regard, delivering only 137.9ps of measured audio jitter – it was let down mainly by issues relating to the cabinet and its rigidity. But with this iteration there's a notable increase in audio jitter, which is up to 461.7ps.

As a DVD player it's relatively poor, with a measured high frequency response of -6.14dB (@ 5.8MHz). This is worse than the original, but is mitigated by the scaler, which is actually really rather good.

However, the Slim has a more significant tech ace up its sleeve. Unlike the original PS3, which decoded hi-rez soundtracks to linear PCM, **you can now bitstream out Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD Master Audio** to a waiting receiver over HDMI. It's a welcome refinement and one that puts the console on par with current standalone players.

BD picture quality is very good, and Java loading speed is phenomenally fast. *Crank 2: High Voltage*, which has more than its fair share of creative code, bedded-in faster on the PS3 Slim than it did on a high-end Sony BDP-S5000ES. However, this speed is ruined by average disc-loading speeds – the slot mechanism on this model is inferior to that of the first-gen model.

Overall, the PS3 Slim is a worthwhile update for the Sony games console. Commercially it hits all the right buttons, but in pure AV terms, only the ability to bitstream out lossless audio is advantageous over the original. That said, it remains a seductive proposition ●

AV/CV

Product: Second-generation PlayStation 3 Blu-ray games console

Positioning: Replaces the original PS3 to become the daddy of Sony's gaming division

Peers: Xbox 360 and numerous dedicated entry-level Blu-ray players

Improved: Sony's PS3 now bitstreams HD audio over HDMI



→ Tech Labs

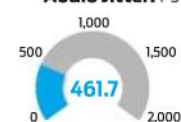
Power consumption: Watts



Idling: Even idling, Sony's PS3 Slim uses a lot of juice (but this is around half the consumption of the original PS3)

Playing: Enormous power consumption compared to an average BD player – more like a fully-blown PC

Audio Jitter: Ps



Analogue: Good, but not as good as the original PlayStation 3 which recorded an analogue audio jitter measurement of 137.9ps

Loading: Boot/Java

Boot speed

4s

Disc in to main BD menu

66s

Disc loading & Java:

While loading is phenomenally fast, at around 4 seconds, disc-loading speed drags down the total to an average 66 seconds

HCC VERDICT

Sony PlayStation 3 Slim
 £250 Approx

Price check: www.techradar.com/631210

Highs: Good BD performance; Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output

Lows: More power consumption than a BD deck; average DVD playback

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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Feature creature

Samsung shows **Danny Philips** it's still at the sharp end of the BD world



If Panasonic is the master Blu-ray innovator, Samsung is snapping at its heels. The latest players from the Korean giant have more nifty USPs than a series of *Dragon's Den*.

The BD-P3600 is the best-equipped BD player from Samsung, and the key word is convenience. It supports BD Live and BonusView, but while most Profile 2.0 Blu-ray players make you buy a USB flash drive or SD card for updates and downloads, the P3600 has 1GB of built-in memory.

Its wireless talents are a boon. Plug the supplied wi-fi USB dongle into the rear port and you can hook up to the web cable-free, although there's an Ethernet port if you don't have a wireless router.

Music in the stream

It also lets you stream music and videos from a PC wirelessly. The Auto network search played MP3 files without hitch after I'd punched in my laptop's IP address and folder name.

With the wi-fi dongle in the rear USB port, multimedia playback is handled by a USB port on the front. File support is healthy – including DivX HD support. I loaded up the 720p *Madagascar* trailer from a USB stick and the picture was crisp and vivid. It stuttered a bit with *Elephant's Dream* (also 720p) streamed over my home network but the quality was impressive. XviD, MP3, JPEG can also be played, but not WMA.

Unlike the wall-mountable BD-P4600 (reviewed in HCC #169), the BD-P3600 has a more conventional design, but it's still a minimal, slimline looker.

On the rear are all the sockets you'd expect (HDMI 1.3 out, component, composite, optical digital out) and more, namely a set of 7.1-channel analogue outs. That way you can revel in the hi-rez delights of Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD if your receiver lacks HDMI inputs, but it also pipes the raw bitstreams if your amp allows it.

With *Hellboy II*, detail retrieval and black levels are terrific, augmenting the richness and depth of Guillermo del Toro's decadent visuals. During the Troll Market scene, the subtle background detail is exposed without any digital muck, plus it drapes the screen in luxurious colours and renders edges decisively.

The Samsung also gets a clean bill of health with the Silicon Optix HQV tests,

rendering diagonal edges without jaggies and offering flicker-free playback of the Film Resolution test. Its pictures aren't as pristine or emphatic as the Panasonic DMP-BD80 or Pioneer BDP-LX71, but remember this is a cheaper player – you'd be a fool to complain.

The deck achieves a reasonable audio performance too, ripping through the raucous *Hellboy Vs Elemental* scene with sheer relish via the 7.1-channel analogue outputs and treating me to a clean, well-rounded performance with a range of music CDs.

Stylish, skilled and bursting with innovation, the BD-P3600 is mainstream Blu-ray at its most electrifying and gives competing decks a real run for their money ●

AV/CV

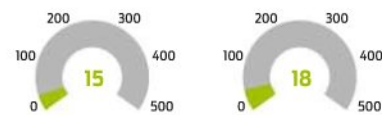
Product:
Profile 2.0
Blu-ray player

Positioning:
Top of the range
player aimed
at enthusiasts

Peers:
LG BD370;
Panasonic
DMP-BD80

Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



Idling: Very much what you would expect for a device of this type, but you might want to turn it fully off to save cash

Playing: Not much increase over idling, so no nasty surprises there

Audio Jitter: Ps



Analogue: An unremarkable figure – not the worst we have seen but no record-breaker

Loading: Boot/Java

Boot speed & tray eject

4s

Tray in to main BD menu

52s

Disc loading & Java:

Disc tray opens in a speedy 4s, though booting takes 15s. Java loading is an undistinguished 52s



HCC VERDICT

Samsung BD-P3600
£250 Approx

Price check: www.techradar.com/629198

Highs: Wi-fi/PC streaming; memory; pics and sound; 7.1-channel outs; disc loading; DivX HD

Lows: No WMA support; PC streaming tricky to set up

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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Code GV800

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Code HDUS

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Code KIRA

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Code KIRAM

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Work of art, waste of money?

Mark Craven struggles to appreciate Sony's Picture Frame TV

Sony, eh? Fresh from being wowed by one of the best-performing LCDs of 2009 (see the 46-Z5500, HCC #173), we now come back to Earth with a bang thanks to an extravagant 32in TV with a bizarre picture-frame design.

Highs

- Another Sony LCD, another fantastic black level response. Maybe we don't need LED-lit TVs after all? Elsewhere, colour fidelity and detail levels are also good.
- This may be only a 32in model, but

it still ships with the multimedia goodies of bigger Bravias: Ethernet connectivity for access to a networked PC and Sony's AppliCast internet media portal, and a USB port for movie, photo and music playback.

Lows

- A glance at Sony's TV lineup reveals the E5500 offers almost identical specs to the W5500. The latter costs a few hundred quid less, so you're paying a fair chunk of the £1,000 price for the curious design.
- Don't set MotionFlow processing to High – or you'll end up with a plasticky, unnatural picture.
- AppliCast needs more content.



Art attack:

If you want a TV with a bezel that looks like a picture frame, then this Sony is for you

HCC VERDICT

Sony KDL-32E5500
£1,000 Approx

Price check: www.techradar.com/629174

Overall: **1 2 3 4 5**

TOSHIBA SD490 → £50 Approx → www.toshiba.co.uk

Waiting for Blu-ray

Even mid-range DVD decks are cheap, says **Chris Jenkins**



Available for as little as £50, it's somewhat surprising to discover that the SD490 isn't Toshiba's entry-level DVD deck (that honour goes to the £30 SD190). In fact, it's just one of seven DVD players currently available from the brand, the king of which is the super-upscaling XD-E500 (itself available for less than £100. How does anyone make money out of DVD these days?).

Highs

- Picture quality is acceptable, with a good contrast range and very little blocking or noise. Upscaled HDMI images (all the way to 1080p) are noticeably sharper than those output

via RGB Scart, proving that the Tosh's silicon is doing something positive.

- Setup and use are easy, and the handset is uncluttered and straightforward – your five-year-old will have no problems.
- If you have four ageing DVD players in your house, you could replace them all with the SD490 for less than the price of a family ticket to Alton Towers.

Lows

- While the SD490 will play MP3, JPEG and DivX files, it'll only do so from discs (DVDs and CDs). A USB port would have been a welcome addition.

- The general build doesn't inspire much confidence, and the styling is bland.
- Some issues with jaggies – it struggled in our Tech Labs with our Silicon Optix reference disc.
- The front-panel display only shows the current Chapter number during playback, as opposed to running time. Very odd and annoying.

HCC VERDICT

Toshiba SD490
£50 Approx

Price check: www.techradar.com/629178

Overall: **1 2 3 4 5**

In Brief

HD218

Sennheiser
£35 Approx

Some people know that it's how headphones sound, and not how they look, that's vital – which is where these on-ear cans come in. Comfortable, bassy (and still quite stylish) the HD218's deliver a much improved sound compared to skinny in-ear 'phones. They're meant for portable audio, too – so maybe it's time to bin those white iPod buds, eh?



1 2 3 4 5

Leader of the pack

Samsung's 200HZ LED TV leaves **John Archer** grinning like a Cheshire Cat

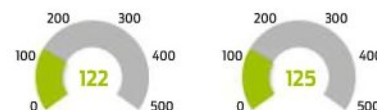


→ Specifications

HD Ready: YES Full HD, 1080p24
Progressive scan: YES NTSC and PAL
Digital TV tuner: YES
Scart: NO but adaptor is provided
Component video: YES one input
HDMI: YES four v1.3 HDMI's
PC input: YES
Resolution: 1920 x 1080
Brightness: N/A
Contrast ratio (claimed): 3,000,000:1
Dimensions: 902(w) x 590(H) x 94(d)mm
Weight: 17.7kg
Features: MPEG noise reduction; online functionality with optional wireless connectivity; DLNA PC connection; USB input

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



White screen:
 122W is normal for a 46in TV. Use the Energy Saving Mode in dim lighting

Test footage:
 Consumption increases to 125W for full audio movie footage

TV contrast: ratio



Picture: The Standard mode contrast level almost doubled to 40,965:1 in Dynamic mode; luminance is a relatively high 83.07fL. Interestingly, Sony's CCFL-based Z4500 (HCC #173) measures a higher contrast ratio and luminance

Colour temp: Kelvin



Presets: The Warm 2 preset is acceptable; Advanced Settings can render a perfect result.
 Cool: 10,394K
 Normal: 9,268K
 Warm 1: 7,734K
 Warm 2: 6,313K
 Warm 3: 6,650K

As well as launching a whole category of LED-lit LCD TVs while most rivals are still struggling to get one or two models out, Samsung has upset the apple cart by proving with the UE40B7000 (HCC #171) that LCD TVs using edge-mounted LEDs aren't necessarily a poor relation to the original direct LED approach.

The B8000 tested here is a step up from the B7000 – the main step being 200Hz processing. This is a genuine system, too, where the picture really does refresh 200 times a second, rather than the pseudo 200Hz trickery employed by Philips and LG that combines a 100Hz refresh rate with a scanning backlight.

The only other real difference between the B8000 and B7000 ranges is the addition of a metallic desktop stand and eye-catching edge trim to the already chic design.

Features the UE46B8000 shares with the B7000s include a depth of just 30mm; quadruple HDMI's; twin USB port; and a LAN socket. You can access Samsung's online service via the LAN or an optional (£40 or so) wi-fi USB dongle.

In action, the UE46B8000 delivers all the picture strengths of its stablemate while also injecting extra quality courtesy of the 200Hz system. Blacks are deep and natural, and deliver a robust two-fingered salute towards people who reckon edge-mounted LEDs struggle in this area. Colours excel, too, achieving intense saturations without looking unreal – provided you avoid the Dynamic picture mode, at least.

Furthermore, since Samsung's 200Hz engine is genuine, there's little of the flickering and ghosting that can mar pseudo 200Hz systems based around scanning backlights.

My only picture concerns are the way contrast plummets if you watch off axis, and the poorly-judged nature of some of the TV's presets. Oh, and please partner the 46B8000 with a separate audio system – its built-in speakers are as flimsy as an MP3's expenses claim.

Despite these quibbles, the 46B8000 remains one of the finest displays I've seen. It might even be the TV that potentially kills off direct LED lighting before it's even properly got started ●

AV/CV

Product:
 A 46in model with edge-based LED lighting, 200Hz, and online functionality

Position:
 The 46B8000 belongs to Samsung's flagship TV range, a step above the B7000 series (which lacks 200Hz) and the normal-backlight B650 LCD range

Peers:
 Sony 40ZX1;
 Philips' 42PFL9803;
 Sony's X4500 models

HCC VERDICT

Samsung UE-46B8000
£1,800 Approx

Price check: www.techradar.com/627639

Highs: Gorgeous design; outstanding picture quality; 200Hz works well; loads of features

Lows: Audio is weak; some of the picture settings are awful; limited viewing angle

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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Samsung

UE40B7020 LED-backlit TV

At only 2.9cm deep, Samsung's UE40B7020 is breathtakingly thin. On its LED-backlit screen, vivid details are captured in every frame. Picture edge-blur removed and full, robust colour restored to each pixel. It's a remarkable feat of design, on or off.



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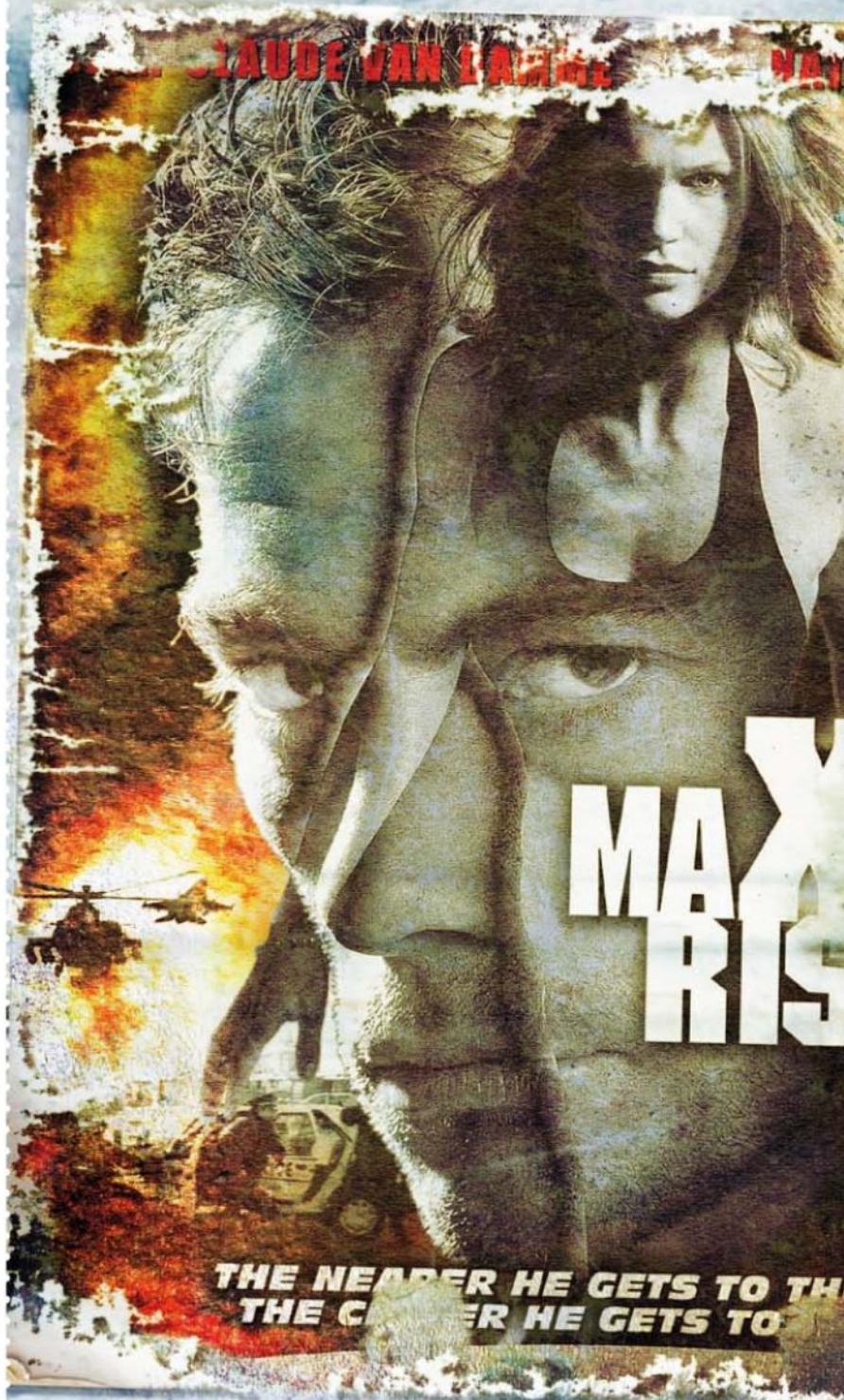
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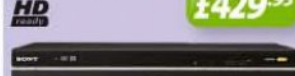
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PLAYBACK

→ **Software highlights** **CRANK 2** Statham wants his 'strawberry tart' back!

X-MEN ORIGINS: WOLVERINE Go back to the beginning of this hi-def hero **GLADIATOR** Ridley Scott's epic takes the battle to Blu-ray **DOLLHOUSE** You know you want to play with them **DEAD SNOW** Hi-def horror with Nazi zombies **12 ROUNDS** Blu-ray brawler **AND MUCH MORE!**

Carmageddon

Fast & Furious → R2 DVD → Universal Pictures

Girls. Cars. Vin Diesel. Our expert reviewers give the *Fast & Furious* DVD a test drive on p97

HCC Ratings key	
Action Man	1 2 3 4 5
Chucky	1 2 3 4 5
Barbie	1 2 3 4 5
Cindy	1 2 3 4 5
Tiny Tears	1 2 3 4 5



The final of the National Shouting Championships was neck and neck



X-Men X-panded

Is Wolverine cool enough to go it alone? This Blu-ray certainly says so



HCC VERDICT

X-Men Origins: Wolverine
20th Century Fox → Region
A/B → £29 Approx

We say: Ignore the naysayers – this impressive Blu release proves that *Wolverine* is a real HD hero

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

X-Men Origins: Wolverine

had a tough time before it even reached cinemas, thanks to an internet-leaked workprint that was picked apart by fanboys. However, for all the geek grumbling and sub-par CG effects, this is actually a fairly solid addition to the *X-Men* franchise (it's much better than *X-Men: The Last Stand*) with a decent story, well-choreographed action and plenty of mutant cameos. And for those who care, the Blu-ray cut finishes with the Deadpool scene.

Mark Craven: There's very little to criticise when it comes to this gorgeous AVC 2.40:1 encode. Fine detailing is excellent, colours are both vivid and stable, flesh tones are realistic, and there's a layer of fine grain present to add some grittiness and filmic feel to the visuals. It's just a shame that the clarity and sharpness of the imagery draws attention to some of the average CG work. Also, there are a couple of scenes (such as Wolverine's confrontation with Stryker in the hospital corridor in Chapter 10) that look surprisingly flat.

Steve May: The L/C/R of *XMO:W* is as wide as *Wolverine* is short; so much so that it often seems that the world's favourite clawbound superhero is sharing the stage with a full orchestra plus choir. Not that I mind much. The score, by the prolific

and talented Harry Gregson-Williams, is a blast; full of drama and excitement and done great justice by the clarity of DTS-HD MA. As befits a big-budget popcorn flick, there's plenty going on in the 5.1 mix (typified by the excellent opening sequence which shows Wolverine and Sabretooth fighting together through the ages). The audio is layered, fidelity is high and there's no shortage of portentous bass in the .1 channel.

Anton van Beek: As with the previous *X-Men* films, ...*Wolverine* is overloaded with bonus bits. There's a pair of chatty commentary tracks (the first by director Gavin Hood, the second producers Lauren Shuler Donner and Ralph Winter); a 16-minute conversation with comic book legends Stan Lee and Len Wein; a 12-minute *Making of...* featurette; ten *Mutant File* videos (mixing background info on the characters, cast interviews and behind-the-scenes footage); a look at the making of a helicopter stunt; four deleted scenes (including the alternate Japanese Bar ending); and red carpet footage. In terms of Blu-ray-exclusive stuff, there are three picture-in-picture tracks, a pop-up trivia track and Fox's new Live Lookup BD-Live feature, allowing you to access filmogs and other info from the IMDB while watching the film.

Infestation

Icon → All-Region Blu-ray
£20 Approx



Reminiscent of the far superior *Tremors*, *Infestation* – where big bugs are taking over America – is a

schlocky trip back to the days of fun-packed creature features.

The Blu-ray's 1.78:1 AVC encode looks pleasingly natural, if a touch subdued. There's not much to choose between the DTS-HD MA and DD 5.1 tracks in terms of dynamics, which is a good thing as our review sample suffered sync issues with the former (Icon says it is aware of the problem and will correct it before release). Extras include a director's commentary, *Making of...* feature and trailer. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Hannibal

Universal Pictures → All-Region
Blu-ray → £20 Approx



A decade after *The Silence of the Lambs*, Ridley Scott delivered this overwrought sequel. Shot through

with the director's signature icy blues and deep blacks, *Hannibal* is a rather cold-looking film and this VC-1 1.85:1 encode doesn't exactly scream hi-def. However, a comparison with the DVD shows an upgrade in clarity and shadow detail. The DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix revels in the more dynamic scenes (opening shootout, killer pig rampage, etc.) and operatic score. Completing the package are a chat track, 75-min *Making of...*, 13 deleted scenes and an alternate ending. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Dead Snow

E1 Entertainment → Region B Blu-ray
£23 Approx



While not quite up to the standards of 1977's zombie-Nazi classic *Shock Waves*, low-budget

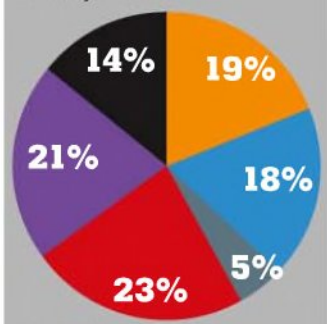
Norwegian horror *Dead Snow* makes a fair stab at re-animating the goose-stepping-ghoul sub-genre. Slightly disappointingly, this UK Blu-ray features a 1080i/50 AVC encode, which the distributor says is the only master the licensor could supply. Still, the imagery holds up well and makes the most of the expansive wilderness locations. The DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio is eerie rather than aggressive, while extras include a 49-min *Making of...*, three additional featurettes and four trailers. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

We asked you...

Which was 2009's most disappointing blockbuster?

- X-Men Origins: Wolverine
- Watchmen
- Star Trek
- Terminator: Salvation
- Transformers 2
- Harry Potter 6



Results of poll from
www.homecinemachoice.com



Fast & Furious

reunites original *The Fast and the Furious* stars Vin Diesel and Paul Walker for a fourth tale of fast cars and revenge. It's all brainless tosh, of course, but thanks to a script that gives Diesel such memorable lines as 'I'm one of those boys who appreciate a fine body regardless of the make,' there's always plenty of blatant homoeroticism to keep you chuckling.

Mark Craven: If anybody tries to tell you that studios aren't putting the effort in with DVD transfers any more, just give them a spin of this disc. Right from the off, *Fast & Furious*' anamorphic 2.40:1 transfer races into pole position as a prime piece of standard-def AV bling. No matter how fast (or, er, furious) the onscreen action gets, there's always an impressive stability and level of detail to the image – with only the occasional (and extremely minor) case of macroblocking to remind you you're still watching a plain old DVD.

Steve May: From its explosive tire-squealing, metal-twisting opening sequence, there's little

doubt that *F&F* has what it takes to be a popular system thrasher. The DD5.1 mix is deliciously dynamic with heaps directional effects and a grunting LFE track. Unfortunately, when the movie takes a breather from the franchise-friendly car porn, it drags like a Jalopy. But just when you think you're about to doze off, the soundtrack moves back into the fast lane. Cars whistling by at speed never gets old... and I dare say the hippety hoppety soundtrack will please the homies.

Anton van Beek: It's a good job that *F&F* delivers such a compelling AV experience, because when it comes to extras this DVD release barely makes it out of the pits. The commentary by director Justin Lin is worth checking out; he does an excellent job discussing how the film's stunts were put together. Beyond that are a couple of disposable mini-featurettes and a gag reel.



HCC VERDICT

Fast & Furious
Universal Pictures → R2
DVD → £20 Approx

We say: This DVD delivers some excellent AV spectacle, but the film itself is more Skoda Octavia than Pagani Zonda

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5
Sound: 1 2 3 4 5
Extras: 1 2 3 4 5
Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

FAQ About Time Travel

Lionsgate → R2 DVD
£16 Approx



Sat on the shelf for over two years (as demonstrated by contemporary scenes showing people smoking in a pub), this British sci-fi comedy finds three social outcasts caught up in a time travel conundrum while downing a few pints at their local. Occasionally capable of delivering a real laugh-out-loud moment, the film's biggest problem is that it feels like a one-off TV drama. Still, Anna Faris is in it, which is always a Good Thing – unlike the disc's flat and stage-bound anamorphic 1.78:1 picture, lifeless DD5.1 audio and lack of extras. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

The Butterfly Effect Trilogy

Icon → Region B/All-Region BD
£25 Approx



This teen time travel franchise makes the jump to HD with this two-disc set. While the first disc squeezes in both the first and second films, neither AVC 1.78:1 encode seems to suffer much from compression issues, and the DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio mixes are effective. The brand new *Butterfly Effect 3: Revelations* mixes up the time travel shenanigans with a serial killer story and gets a disc to itself, although the AVC 1.78:1 visuals are average at best. There are no extras for any film. Curiously, while the first disc is locked to Region B, the second will play anywhere. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Traitor

Momentum Pictures → All-Region BD
£25 Approx



An attempt to merge the action genre with political issues, *Traitor* stars Don Cheadle as an ex US Special Ops officer, and Muslim, who's caught selling weapons to Anti-American terrorists. But is everything as straightforward as it seems?

This pleasing change from typical Hollywood fodder also delivers as a hi-def experience. The AVC 2.40:1 encode features striking contrast and impressive detail, while the TrueHD 5.1 sonics are suitably aggressive, despite occasionally woolly directionality. Extras are limited to a commentary, two five-minute featurettes and the trailer. **MC**

1 2 3 4 5

I Love You, Man

Paramount → R2 DVD
£20 Approx



The 'bro-mance' bandwagon rolls on with this Paul Rudd vehicle that is most notable for not having über producer Judd 'Superbad' Apatow involved in any stage of its production. Rudd stars as a guy with no male friends who embarks on a series of 'man-dates' in an effort to find a best man for his forthcoming wedding. The upshot is only sporadically amusing.

It's a comedy, so the DD5.1 audio is disappointingly focussed on the front speakers; the anamorphic 1.85:1 transfer is more inviting. A commentary, *Making of...*, deleted scenes and endless outtakes make up the extras. **MC**

1 2 3 4 5

He ain't Hulk

WWE star falls flat on film

12 Rounds is the second attempt at turning World Wrestling Entertainment superstar John Cena into a bigscreen action star, and it's honestly no better than his dismal 2006 debut *The Marine*. Director Renny Harlin (who's fallen a long way since *Die Hard 2* and *Cliffhanger*) brings a little panache to the on-screen action, but the story, about a madman (*Queer as Folk*'s Aiden Gillen) forcing Cena's super-cop to complete 12 tasks if he wants to see his wife again, is stupid even for a mindless action flick. Big, dumb and not a lot of fun.

Mark Craven: For the most part, *12 Rounds*' Blu-ray's AVC 2.40:1 encode really delivers the goods in terms of image quality, filling the screen with an impressive crispness and vibrant colours (for a good example, check out the retina-scalding reds and yellows when the house explodes in Chapter 11). However, every now and again you'll come across a sequence that doesn't quite measure up, such as the opening nighttime chase, which features flat and lifeless blacks.

Steve May: Fox's DTS-HD Master Audio mix is as subtle as a knuckle sandwich. Things explode with deafening regularity and ensure you're always well aware of the 5.1 canvas, but there's scant imagination evident in the sound design. In sheer high-fidelity terms there's little to complain about, although this is another example of a movie



12 Rounds' entire effects budget goes up in smoke

where the LFE channel is used indiscriminately; waves of deep bass ripple out at the drop of a hat – rather than create sonic depth, it just ends up a little tiresome. The score by Trevor Rabin is suitably bombastic but ultimately forgettable.

Anton van Beek: Because *12 Rounds* is a quite horrendously pointless film, it naturally means that it comes with a shedload of extra features – such are the mysterious ways of Hollywood.

Anyway, there's nothing particularly exciting here. Most of it is typical EPK-fodder – talking heads, plenty of self-congratulation, etc. – but there are a couple of moderately interesting behind-the-scenes featurettes dealing with a some of the stunt sequences. The rest of the bonus stuff includes a commentary from John Cena and writer Daniel Kuna (but not, for reason, the director's commentary from the US release), a gag reel, 15 additional micro featurettes, two alternate endings (with optional commentary) and two spoof viral videos.



HCC VERDICT

12 Rounds: Extreme Cut → 20th Century Fox
Region B BD → £29 Approx

We say: 12 Rounds staggers around like a punch-drunk has-been. Looks good, though

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Electrical excellence

This Jason Statham sequel is real high voltage rock 'n' roll

Laughing at the name Chev Chelios will get you into trouble



Crank 2: High Voltage is the film equivalent of Marmite – you'll either love it or hate it. An adrenalin-charged sequel to a surprise cult hit, it takes the most outlandish elements of the original, and, erm, cranks them up into an OTT rollercoaster ride. It's crass, violent and energy-sapping, mixing porn star cameos with dismembered heads, Godzilla parodies and Geri Halliwell for a film experience like no other. Watch it, but maybe not with the wife and kids.

Mark Craven: Shot on a variety of 'pro-sumer' HD camcorders (including Canon's £700 HF-10) in some of the scuzziest parts of LA imaginable, *Crank 2* isn't the prettiest flick you'll ever see. But Lionsgate's AVC 1.85:1 encode still impresses – blacks are solid, fleshtones are accurate and the numerous facial close-ups are beautifully detailed, with pin-sharp beads of sweat, gaping pores and tiny hairs. There are some instances of ugly aliasing, but on the whole this Blu-ray release brilliantly captures the film's intentionally gritty grindhouse aesthetic.

Steve May: I doubt there'll be a BD release this year with a more intense soundtrack than *Crank 2*. An inspired maelstrom of mashed-up metal music, weapons fire and miscellaneous directional effects, it's guaranteed to juice any kit. Take Chapter 3, *Jump Start*, wherein Jason Statham's maladjusted hitman looks to give his

clockwork heart an automotive jumpstart: here, the thrum of the car engine, the failing battery and the *frtizting* of the wires all spin around the soundfield – then our heartless hero drives the motor off into a hail of gunfire, before the J-pop soundtrack soars over the racket. A beautiful sonic sequence, effortlessly done.

Chapter 13, *High Voltage Arena*, is similarly layered. Chev stalks around a power station, with neat directional cues, before taking a power-blast and turning into Chevzilla(!), complete with full 360-degree soundwrap. This 7.1 DTS-HD MA presentation left me grinning like a dope.

Anton van Beek: Unlike the original, *Crank 2* hits the UK loaded with extras, including several Blu-ray exclusives. Chief amongst these is the *Crank'd Out Commentary*, a picture-in-picture feature mixing interviews with the cast and crew (exploding silicon breasts are 'a satire of the vacuous nature of LA' apparently) with behind-the-scenes footage. You can flick between having either the movie or the bonus video-stream fill the main screen without having to return to the main menu – handy. Also exclusive to the Blu-ray are a gag reel and BD-Live functionality. The remaining extras consist of an entertaining 51-minute *Making of...* doc, trailer, blooper reel and good old-fashioned audio commentary.



HCC VERDICT

Crank 2: High Voltage → Lionsgate
Region A/B BD → £25 Approx

We say: This Stath-tastic gonzo grindhouse sequel delivers the goods in spectacular style on Blu-ray

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5 >

'Look at her hair – it's real!'

Buffy... creator Joss Whedon is now playing with living dolls

Dollhouse: Season One

finds *Buffy...* creator Joss Whedon returning to the Fox network after a six-year absence, with Eliza Dushku as his leading lady, and a new sci-fi show under his arm. Yet early on, it looked like the *Firefly* debacle was about to repeat itself with reports that Fox didn't 'get' the new series and had forced Whedon to re-shoot the pilot.

When it finally hit screens, even Whedon's biggest fans had to admit that *Dollhouse*'s premise was problematic. It involves a mysterious laboratory that brainwashes its residents to perform specific tasks, before erasing their memories on completion of their assignments. But the quality improved as the show progressed and by the end of the 13-episode run things were definitely looking up. And it appears that Fox agrees, as the company has now commissioned a second series.

Mark Craven: *Dollhouse*'s stylised aesthetic is well-served by the anamorphic 1.78:1 transfers in Fox's four-disc set. Black levels are consistent, contrast is good and detailing is adequate for a contemporary TV series on DVD. Couple that with minimal contrast artefacts and other technical issues, and you have a commendable TV-to-DVD release.

Steve May: Whedon's wildly uneven show is at least consistent when it comes to the Dolby Digital 5.1 presentation. Unfortunately, it's uniformly dull. This is unambitious salt 'n' vinegar TV fare, content with a front-weighted stereoscopic mix. It sounds like it was designed to be heard over two TV speakers, rather than on a home theatre system, and frankly you'll miss nothing if you leave your AVR in standby and just

watch the show via the telly. There's a fair amount of incidental music used through the run, but this also tips to the front. The kindest thing I can say about the show's audio (based on this outing and preceding TV transmissions) is that it's functional.

Anton van Beek: Spread across *Dollhouse: Season One*'s four discs is a fair collection of extra features, and there should be enough to please Whedon fans. Three of the episodes (including the time-jumping controversial final episode *Epitaph One*) offer fun, fact-packed audio commentaries; there's also a stereo presentation of the original unaired pilot (which, for my money, doesn't work as well as the revised version),

23 deleted scenes and five behind-the-scenes featurettes.



Eliza Dushku goes to a very high-tech dentist



HCC VERDICT

Dollhouse: Season One
20th Century Fox → R2
DVD → £25 Approx

We say: It's slow to start, but *Dollhouse* shapes up as nicely as its leaving lady and makes for a well-rounded DVD boxset

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Heroes: Season 3

Universal Playback → R2 DVD
£51 Approx



After a dismal, truncated second season, the once-popular *Heroes* returned for a full-length third year. Sadly, while the episode count was up, the overall quality wasn't – fans were left with another run of disappointing tales.

Of course, if you've stuck with the show this far, you'll be pleased to know that this six-disc DVD set is as worthy as its predecessors. The anamorphic 1.78:1 visuals and DD 5.1 audio are as strong as ever, while generous extras include commentaries, deleted scenes, featurettes, two web stories and a gallery of Tim Sale's art. **MC**

1 2 3 4 5

Psychoville

Zentertain Ltd → Region B BD
£25 Approx



The League of Gentlemen's Reece Shearsmith and Steve Pemberton are the deranged minds

behind this freakish comedy series about a blind recluse, a deranged midwife, a one-handed clown, a murder-obsessed man-child, a telekinetic dwarf and a mysterious, black-clad blackmailer. It's seriously weird, and incredibly funny, and comes on a two-disc Blu-ray set with solid 1080i AVC 1.78:1 encodes for all seven episodes, and DTS-HD MA 2.0 audio. A fan-pleasing batch of extras includes episode commentaries, interviews and a *Making of...* documentary. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

The Uninvited

Paramount → disc version
£18 Approx



Every bit as generic as its new title, this US update of Ji-woon Kim's unique and atmospheric South

Korean shocker *A Tale of Two Sisters* lacks imagination and scares, eliminating all of the spooky ambiguity from the original story in favour of cheap shocks and endless exposition. A real shame.

For all its flaws as a film, though, *The Uninvited* scores well as an AV experience, thanks to a pristine anamorphic 1.85:1 transfer and fairly immersive DD5.1 audio. Four deleted scenes, an alternate ending and a bland featurette are the only extras. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Tormented

Pathé → R2 DVD
£16 Approx



Imagine the cast of *Skins* being picked off one-by-one by the restless spirit of one of their former

classmates. That's pretty much what British horror-com *Tormented* serves up – a variety of obnoxious high school kids dispatched by the angry ghost of a bullied kid. It's not very original – and tonally it's all over the place – but *Tormented* still delivers an entertaining 87 minutes of cheap chills and daft kills.

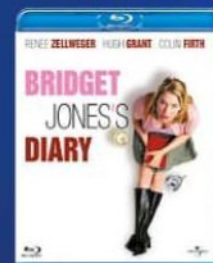
I've no complaints about Pathé's DVD either, which has a sharp, colourful anamorphic 2.35:1 image, functional DD5.1 audio and entertaining extras. **MC**

1 2 3 4 5

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The mix of flatulent horses and flaming arrows made for explosive problems



Maximus hi-defius

Our offerings to the gods of HD have paid off with the arrival of *Gladiator* on Blu-ray



Germania: The opening battle took 20 days to film

Gladiator offers sheer spectacle of the very best kind; a gripping, action-packed tale designed to stir your adrenaline and thrill you with its epic scope. The middle act might sag a little, but it's still the best thing director Ridley Scott has committed to celluloid since *Blade Runner*.

Mark Craven: Both the 155-minute theatrical and 171-minute extended editions are included here via seamless branching, presented as sensational 2.40:1 AVC encodes. From the opening scenes of dark, icy blue-tinted forests, the imagery impresses with the way it realises fine textures; particularly noteworthy is the intricate detailing in the period costumes. When the action moves to

sunnier climes, some subtle digital manipulation (edge enhancement and digital noise reduction)

becomes apparent, but it's marginal enough to not get worked up about.

Steve May: The menus seem louder than appropriate, but this doesn't extend to the rich, lush and perfectly-balanced DTS-HD MA 5.1 movie mix.

While much of the movie is dialogue heavy, it's the raw power of the action sequences that stir the heart. Chapter 11, where Maximus (Russell Crowe) is taken out to fight in Proximo's arena, is alive with sonic incident. The baying crowd noises snake left and right, a swinging mace circles the listening position in slo-mo... This is one disc you'll want to listen to time and again.

Anton van Beek: Both cuts get their own audio commentaries; the extended edition gets an intro from Ridley Scott and the theatrical edition features 13 deleted scenes.

Universal's sluggish U-Control tech also rears its head on both versions, offering links to additional behind-the-scenes content and pop-up trivia, plus the natty ability to select additional bonus bits from a pop-up list to watch later. These all lurk on Disc Two (there are over 300 of 'em, including deleted material, behind-the-scenes footage, interviews, photo galleries and pre-viz videos). Put that disc in, and your selections will automatically appear at the top of the list. Neat.

As if that wasn't enough, there's also a 197-min documentary, numerous art galleries, five deleted scenes, seven extra featurettes, two trailers and 20 TV spots. Phew.

HCC VERDICT

Gladiator: 2-Disc Special Ed → Universal Pictures → All-region BD → £25 Approx

We say: Ridley Scott's fabulous swords 'n' sandals flick is a Blu-ray treat of epic proportions

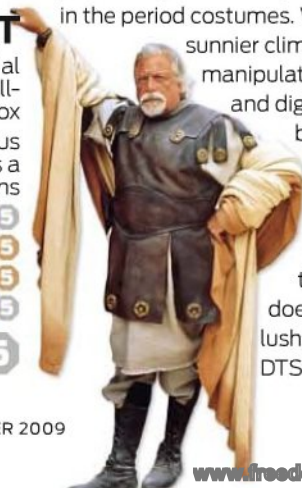
Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5



Where wolf? Here wolf!

John Landis' horror classic hits Blu-ray, but will it leave you howling in anger?

An American Werewolf in London

may be nearly 30 years old, but it's aged well, retaining the capacity to both make you laugh and weird you out. In fact, John Landis' tale of an American backpacker with a nasty dose of lycanthropy ravaging the West End is still the pinnacle of the horror-com genre and worthy of a place on any film fan's shelf.

Mark Craven: Ah, this is what BD is all about – classic films, which many of us saw first on grotty VHS tapes, brought back to their true glory. Well, sort of. AAWIL's VC-1 1.85:1 encode isn't exactly a howling success. The picture here has more grain than a peasant's diet, because of the quality of the original film stock, no doubt, and there's also plenty of print damage – obviously the guy at Universal who cleans up transfers was on holiday when this was encoded. On the other hand, edges are sharp and the colours, particularly the red of David Naughton's parka, and Griffin Dunne's blood, look more vivid than you've ever seen before.

Steve May: If you've heard this seminal monster movie in DD 5.1 on DVD, then I'd argue you're not gonna uncover much more of substance in this DTS-HD MA 5.1 presentation. The soundstage is occasionally wide, and there are some nice directional effects to stoke the atmosphere (the werewolf howls rear left, then rear right, before dining in the opening reel), but the dialogue sounds as if it was recorded out on the moors throughout, and the Foley dramatics are as sharp as a wolf's fang. Like the video, it appears that no remastering has been undertaken for this release. And that's enough to have any horror fan howling at the moon in frustration.



Anton van Beek: The lacklustre AV quality of this BD release is only compounded by the quality of the bonus features. Most of the material here will be familiar to anybody who picked up the earlier Special Edition DVD, including a commentary by the male leads, storyboards, interviews with director John Landis and makeup artist Rick Baker, outtakes and a vintage featurette. But there are some new items as well, including D-Box Motion Code, another interview with Rick Baker and, best of all, a spectacular new 98-min documentary (see page 10 for more) looking back at the film's production.

HCC VERDICT

An American Werewolf in London → Universal → All-region BD → £20 Approx

We say: This '80s' horror classic has great extras, but needs some serious remastering

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

The Dark Crystal

Sony Pictures → All-region BD
£20 Approx



In an age before CGI, cinema turned to puppetry for its fantasy fix, and *The Dark Crystal* stands as a curious example of that forgotten era. It's all very Roger Dean and silly, but the unending weirdness of Jim Henson's vision wins through.

The Dolby TrueHD 5.1 audio is as good as any Gelfling might reasonably expect – dialogue is clean, but the Foley effects sound dated and the score a little tremulous. Picture quality is better: detail is high and colours are lush and rich. Special features include a storyboard PIP track, chat track, test footage and more. **SM**

1 2 3 4 5

Labyrinth

Sony Pictures → All-region BD
£20 Approx



Another '80s' Henson fantasy flick, this time with a young Jennifer Connelly running around in circles at the behest of David Bowie's camp Goblin King and hundreds of puppet monsters. Whatever its narrative issues, *Labyrinth* always looked great – something this AVC 2.35:1 1080p encode highlights. Both fine detailing and colour saturation is far beyond anything previous DVDs (including the Superbit disc) ever managed. The TrueHD 5.1 audio is less spectacular, due to the limits of the source material. Lots of quality extras here, including a new PIP track. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

The Elephant Man

Optimum → Region B BD
£25 Approx



David Lynch's mesmerising biopic of freaky-faced Victorian John Merrick comes to Blu-ray with a strong black-and-white AVC 2.35:1 encode and atmospheric DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtrack. It's part of the new Studio Canal Collection (another competitor for the title of Europe's answer to the Criterion Collection). Extras include around an hour of interviews with the maverick director, the 20-min featurette *The Real Elephant Man* and a booklet containing an analysis of the film by *Time Out's* film critic Tom Huddleston. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Woodstock: Ultimate Collector's

Warner Home Video → All-region BD
£23 Approx



This 224-min cut of *Woodstock: 3 Days of Peace & Music* looks and sounds better than ever before in its hi-def debut. Presented in a variety of aspect ratios, and shot on three different 16mm film stocks, this is tricky material to get right, but the VC-1 restoration job is exceptional. The same is true of the Dolby TrueHD 5.1 mix, which is sparkingly clear yet faithful to the source material. A second disc throws together top-notch extras, including over two hours of never-before-seen concert footage. **MC**

1 2 3 4 5

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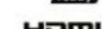
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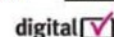
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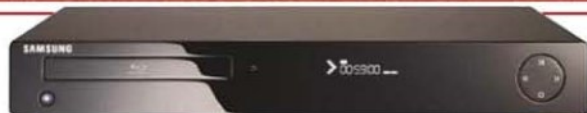
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Feedback

Got an axe to grind? Want to comment on current technology? Need to share? **HCC** is here to help

THX treachery!

Hi, thought you would be interested in the following. Last week I purchased an advertised 'Genuine' THX demo disc from eBay. What arrived in the post was one of your 'Free' giveaway promotional discs.

It clearly states in writing what this disc is to be used for, and that it is not for resale. The seller has informed me he has sold 60 of these discs and has them still advertised on eBay. He is charging £25 for the privilege!

I have reported this to eBay, and informed him. He seems keen for me to return the front cover back to him – I wonder why?!

Richard, via email

Thanks Richard – not sure where this guy got hold of our discs! It's a shame you've



Sony's BDP-S5000ES Blu-ray player – premium performance, but at a price

shelled out £25 for the THX Demo Disc, because we still have a few copies of HCC #149 available as back issues.

Choosing Blu

Just a quick question: based on your experience, what is a good

Blu-ray player with the best quality/price ratio?

Thank you and thanks for your web site.
Domenico Corradi, Italy

Panasonic's DMP-BD80, LG's BD390 (see page 68) and

Samsung's BD-P3600 (p84) offer quality BD performance at attractive prices, with all sort of additional, webby features thrown in. There are better-specced decks from the likes of Pioneer, Sony and Denon, but these come



Kuro fanboy fights back

Señor Henderson states in his review of Panasonic's new plasma – the TX-P46Z1 (in HCC #172) – that comparing the Pioneer Kuro to Panny's new model is like comparing a 1966 Alfa Romeo Spider to a BMW 5 Series. That's pretty hilarious. Are some of Rik's amigos at the mag spiking his coffee with something?

The bottom line is the new Panasonic model is obviously a fine television with some serious tech on board, if a bit overpriced. Most guys out there are looking for the AV Holy Grail of the purest sound and best picture in a television, but, alas, Panny still can't match the Kuro for pure picture processing. And, as for design, no television can match the Pioneers in the looks department either. I would equate Panasonic's new flagship model to the Renault Megane – with its myriad of safety features, it's a great family car –

while the Kuro will forever be classed as the Aston Martin DB9 of televisions, because of its gorgeous looks and awesome performance. And



classics only get better with age and never go out of fashion. I know which TV I would want to grace my living room. End of argument, Rik!

Joseph Lacey, Dublin

Rik Henderson replies: I like your analogies, especially the Z1/Megane comparison – it made me laugh like a giddy fool (and I admit that I only ever tend to see Meganes in a silver finish, so you may be onto something). However, you've made one, frankly, schoolboy error... Aston Martin still manufactures the DB9. Pioneer no longer builds Kuro TVs. No matter how good they were.

My original point was that as Pioneer has ceased production of Kuro plasma TVs, they are now more like classic sports cars. Current owners adore them with the same feverish devotion as members of

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at a cost. Oh, and don't forget Sony's PlayStation 3 Slim (p82) – a good value Blu-ray spinner that happens to play hi-def games, too.

A simple question

Hi, how do I go about buying the first whole series of *True Blood* on Blu-ray?

Stephanie, via email

Right. There are two options open to you. At the moment *True Blood: The Complete First Season* is only available in the US, but as it's coded for all-regions, it can be imported from specialist websites like www.movietyme.com and it will work on a UK Blu-ray player.

The other possibility is to wait until October 26 when HBO will be releasing the

series on DVD and Blu-ray here in the UK.

Kit dilemma

Hi there. My system consists of a Denon AVCA-11SR with a Miller & Kreisel THX 7.1 speaker system, an Arcam AV50 with a Paradigm 5.1 speaker system for music and an Arcam 8SE CD player.

I also have a Sony PS3, Virgin Media cable HD box and am in the process of obtaining two Humax Freesat PVRs.

I need some advice and I'm sure I am not the only person faced with this dilemma:

Neither of my amps support HDMI. Listening to music CDs through my Arcam system is great and, if I want to watch/listen to music DVDs then I do so via my Denon system. Watching TV and films is obviously also done via the Denon. However I feel I am losing out on the sound of Blu-ray due to my lack of HDMI connectivity. I don't seem to get any sound out of my rears and very little out of the side speakers. So should I:

- 1) Buy a new amp, I can't afford an expensive one so would probably have to go with a Pioneer SC-LX81 and get shot of the Denon.
- 2) Buy a dedicated Blu-ray player that has 7.1 output such as the Panasonic DMP-BD80
- 3) Buy an Octava HDS7A-UK which can take multiple HDMI inputs and provide two 7.1 outputs, thus being able to feed my Arcam and my Denon.
- 4) Stay put for the time being and buy a high-definition projector instead.

I am thinking that option three is probably the best as it means I can use both of my

amps. It's also quite cheap. Do you know if there is a similar product that only offers a single 7.1 output instead of the two for those people who are running a single amp and are facing the same problem?

Thanks in advance for any advice you may offer. Keep up the good work with the magazine, I love the format and the fact that you don't just review TVs and AV amps. I particularly enjoy the film review section – and wouldn't mind if this was even expanded slightly.
Mike, via email

The Octava HDMI-to-7.1 processor, available to buy for around £250, would seem to do exactly what you want, although we haven't any experience of it here at the HCC multiplex. It could be an effective fix for your connection dilemma.

Your long-term best bet, though, is to replace your two amps with a single amp or receiver. Arcam's AVR-600 would be a good solution, but, at £3,500, it might take a while to fund.

Tosh Blu-ray error

Toshiba has missed a trick by not using XDE technology for DVD upscaling in its forthcoming Blu-ray player. Toshiba is great at making DVD players. What kind of idiots work for these companies? Couldn't any of them have suggested to include XDE feature? This would of been an award-winning machine if it did. Toshiba: you flopped big-time!

Bobby D, via HCC online

Well Bobby, given the speed at which Toshiba launched into Blu-ray and the nature of the deck itself, we'd wager that this is an OEM player that will be used to bridge the gap until a genuine Toshiba-made model appears. This would explain the lack of XDE ●

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the Triumph Spitfire fanclub love their cars, regardless of the scarcity of parts and extraordinary costs of servicing. Ultimately, though, my main point is that we shouldn't be constantly comparing new technologies to one that is no longer available. Would you be happy to know that such-and-such LCD TV isn't as good with contrast as a Sony Bravia 28in CRT I bought in 1997? We have to move on. The end (please).

Winner: Star Letter-writer Joseph Lacey wins a copy of *Fast & Furious* on Blu-ray courtesy of Universal Pictures UK. It's available to buy now, priced around £25.

How we test

Home Cinema Choice's hardware reviews combine the subjective opinion of our seasoned reviewers with hard technical data.

Chris Jenkins explains how the *HCC* Tech Labs work

HCC reviews tend to be a mixture of subjective opinion and objective data. While we value the subjective opinions of our highly experienced reviews team, we like to blend and balance their opinions with objective measurements. The *HCC* Tech Labs have been measuring AV equipment for nearly 20 years. It was originally conceived to evaluate the performance of VCRs and CRT TVs, and it is now routinely testing Blu-ray players and HD displays.

Interestingly, much of our first generation hardware is still in use (we maintain an irrational fondness for an oscilloscope used to determine the onset of clipping on amplifiers), although our more venerable hardware is now supplemented by new software and measurement methodologies. One thing remains unchanged though: our commitment to supply you with the best possible buying advice.

Virtual Tour

Our Tech Labs consist of two main facilities: a Viewing Room, and a Test Lab.

The Viewing Room is used mainly for testing TVs, projectors and speakers and has been designed to reproduce the conditions that are found in a typical mid-range home cinema setup. It was created by award-winning custom installers Pounds (www.poundstv.co.uk), and is completely light-proofed. While it is not designed to be sound-proof, it has been skinned in Acoustiblock and has been acoustically treated and tuned by the experts at RPG (www.rpg-europe.co.uk), using custom absorbers and diffusers. The room features multiple HDMI, component video and audio cable runs, as well as analogue and digital TV and satellite feeds, and has a resident 7.2

speaker system. Multiple screens can be fed the same source material simultaneously, courtesy of a Gefen 2-in-4-out HDMI switcher/splitter, for screen shootouts.

Number crunching

The Test Lab is used mainly for number-crunching DVD/Blu-ray players and amplifiers. It's equipped with two industry-standard systems: a Tektronix VM700 video data analyser, and a Miller Audio Research audio analysis suite. Using standard test signals from discs and signal generators, these two systems are used to measure factors such as audio and video signal jitter, frequency response and output power. These give us a good general idea of the component quality, processing power and overall performance of players and amplifiers.

Professionals at large

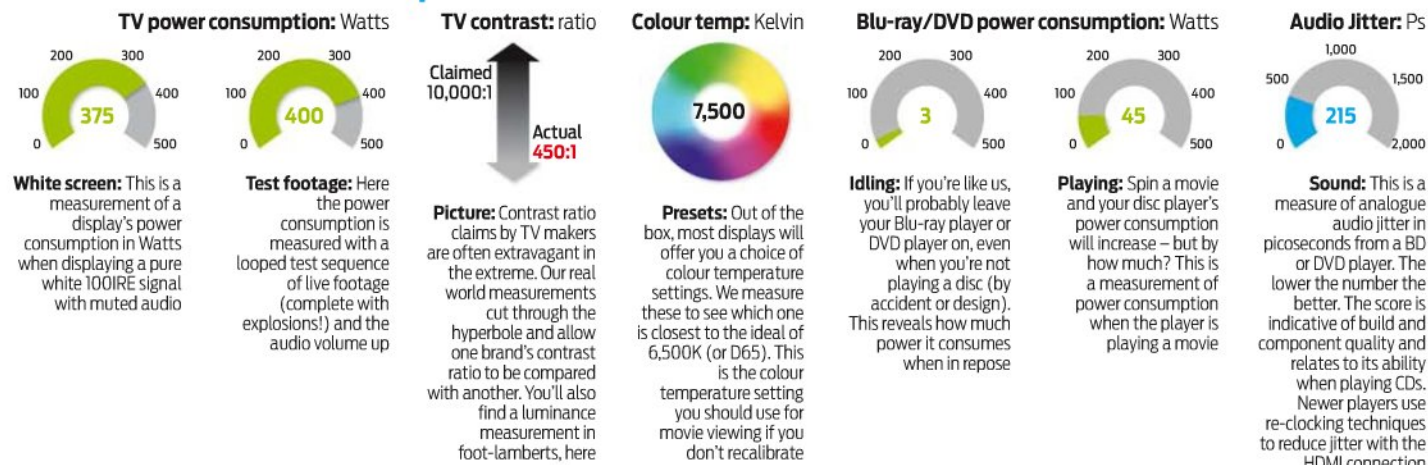
Over the years, our testers have been trained in calibration and testing techniques by the ISF, Tektronix, the Home Acoustics Alliance and other industry bodies. In short, when you read a review in *HCC*, you can be sure that the reviewer's subjective opinion is backed up by objective scientific lab testing.

Understandable and useful

One of our pledges is to present information that is both understandable and useful, for example, exposing the hype perpetrated by some makers of plasmas and LCD TVs regarding contrast ratios. To determine real world contrast, as well as measuring colour temperature presets, we employ a Sencore VP401 signal generator alongside a PC running Datacolor Colorfacts software with a Spyder 2 sensor. We use the Sencore signal generator and our own discs to generate standard TV



Tech Lab tests explained





Test bench:

Equipment from the likes of Snell & Wilcox, and Techtronix allows us to compare all manner of kit

signals. Colorfacts analyses the colour and luminance performance of TVs and projectors, giving us information in areas such as contrast ratio, colour temperature and luminance.

Playback

Increasingly, you've been asking for more information on power consumption, and so we've now moved these

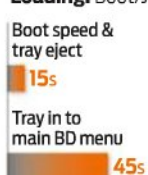
results to a headline position on our tests. We've also developed a more graphical presentation (key below) of some of the data we produce, which should make the facts more relevant and digestible. Not all the data we generate is published (frankly, you'd be bored) but all of it goes into the melting pot of opinion. While one key reviewer is bylined for our tests, as many as four team players will contribute to our findings ●

Video Jitter: Ns



Vision: This is a measure of video jitter in nanoseconds from a BD or DVD player. The lower the number the better. The score is indicative of build and component quality. We also present figures for Chroma Crosstalk (another quality indicator) and frequency response @5.8MHz

Loading: Boot/Java



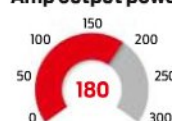
Disc loading & Java: Blu-ray players can be notoriously slow to load and play discs, thanks to the DRM and Java content of BD software. These timings are crucial to the user experience – naturally faster is best

AVR power: Watts

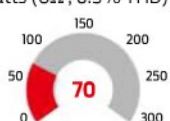


Powered: When you fire up that big AV receiver to watch a new movie you may be surprised to learn just how much current it's drawing. This is one of two measurements we take for AV amp power consumption. The other is when the AVR is powered up but idle

Amp output power: Watts (8Ω, 0.5% THD)

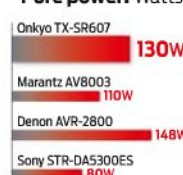


2-channel 8Ω: So just how heroic is that AVR you've been saving for? Putting aside paper claims, we measure its output in two-channel stereo mode. Also noted here is a figure for Total Harmonic Distortion



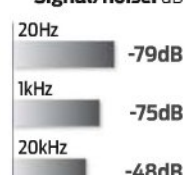
5-channel 8Ω: In most cases, an amplifier's muscle will be diminished when it runs in multichannel mode. We push the product to extremes in a 5.1 configuration to see how much grunt is available with all channels driven

Pure power: Watts



Fidelity firewall: This is our measurement of power untainted by distortion (typically 0.052THD, 8Ω, 1kHz). It's an indicator of both power output and component quality

Signal/noise: dB



S/N tests: These amp measurements reveal the ratio of noise to signal at a specific frequency. Readings taken at low, mid and high points help determine imaging clarity and sonic character

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£189.00 Delivered

APart CMs608 Square Build-In Loudspeaker



£43.01 Delivered

Cinema Seating

£1300.00
Delivered



Signature
cinema seating

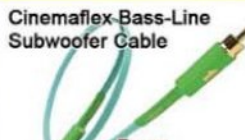
3 colours available, modular system
allows multiple seats with curved layout

Ixos XHP125 UK Mains Cable



£12.70 Delivered

Nordost Subwoofer Cable



From
£159.99 Delivered

Fisual Havana 35



From £19.99 Delivered

Ixos XHT611 Flat Scart Cable



From
£25.89
Delivered

Special Offer
Free Earphones
Whilst Stocks Last

Wireworld Ultraviolet 5+



HDMI to HDMI Cable
From Only
£104.99
Delivered

QED Performance HDMI



★★★★★

Only
£47.20
Delivered

QED Reference Optical Cable



£49.50
Delivered
★★★★★

QED Speaker Cable



NEW
Model

Silver Anniversary
Evolution XT
£5.85 per meter

Fisual 5.0 Speaker Wall Plate



£41.12
Delivered

Fisual Chunky Velcro Ties



Only
£2.99
Delivered

Fisual Duo Shelf Wall Mount



Only
£40
Delivered

Fisual Tilting Wall Bracket



30" to 60"
Only
£29.99
Delivered

Onkyo TX-SR507 Home Cinema Bundle Deal



FREE
SILVER
CABLE PACK
Cinema

ONKYO TX-SR507
Home Cinema Receiver
Jamo A102 HCS5
5.1 Speakers System

★★★★★



Free Cable Pack Worth £85.00

Get your TV Ready For The Digital Switchover



We have a full range of
boosters, splitters,
aerials & custom made
cables for cable,
satellite or terrestrial
available to get the
most out of your TV

5 Star Rated QED Speaker Cables

QED Original Speaker Cable	£3.15 per / metre	★★★★★
QED Silver Anniversary	£4.00 per / metre	★★★★★
QED Silver Anniversary XT	£4.84 per / metre	★★★★★
QED Silver Anniversary XT Bi-Wire	£10.80 per / metre	★★★★★
QED Revelation Speaker Cable	£13.50 per / metre	★★★★★
QED X-Tube XT-400 Speaker Cable	£20.25 per / metre	★★★★★
QED Genesis Speaker Cable	£25.00 per / metre	★★★★★
QED Aircloc Banana and Spades Available		

In association with



SELECT

→ **Buying Guide** **BEST EVER LCD TV** The top performing LCD screens in the UK revealed **HI-DEF PLAYERS** Looking for a Blu-ray deck? We help you choose **PLASMA POWER** Your guide to the ultimate bigscreen TV **ROCKIN' RECEIVERS** The best specs and latest codecs **SUPREME SPEAKERS** Need a 5.1 package? We name the best! **PLUS** subwoofers, projectors, PVRs & more...

**TOP
BUYER'S GUIDE**
**All killer
no
filler**



HCC Ratings key

Officially awesome	1 2 3 4 5
Essential purchase	1 2 3 4 5
Does the job	1 2 3 4 5
Disappointing	1 2 3 4 5
Don't touch it	1 2 3 4 5

NOVEMBER 2009 HOME CINEMA CHOICE

LCD TV

Best on test...



SONY
46in → KDL-46Z5500
£1,900 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

2009 Z-Series builds upon previous Bravia know-how

Highs: Wonderfully detailed pictures; bright, crisp colours
Lows: Black levels are a tad light; poor off-axis viewing

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (and CI slot)

Tested: Issue 173
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/622541



SAMSUNG
32in → LE32B650
£650 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Net-savvy 32incher is a real bargain buy

Highs: Huge feature count; excellent HD pics; sexy design
Lows: SD performance and audio is average

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (and CI slot)

Tested: Issue 172
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/613346



SAMSUNG
40in → UE40B7000
£1,250 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Superslim, edge-lit LED screen looks the business

Highs: Superb HD images; multimedia functions; design
Lows: Poor audio performance; no wi-fi adapter included

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 1 (RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes, (& analogue & CI slot)

Tested: Issue 171
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/604142



PHILIPS
56in → Cinema 21:9
£4,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

A groundbreaking ultra-widescreen TV

Highs: Unique, inspired aspect ratio; detail presentation
Lows: Limited black levels; uneven CCFL backlighting

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
Native resolution: 2560 x 1080
No. of HDMI inputs: 5
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes, plus CI slot

Tested: Issue 171
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/607940



PHILIPS
42in → 42PES0001
£1,800 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Philips' modular TV drops Ambilight but doesn't suffer

Highs: Sexy form factor and quality build; eye-catching images
Lows: Complex menus

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (to 1080p24)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 3
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (& analogue & CI slot)

Tested: Issue 168
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/579400

Also Recommended...



LG
32in → 32LH4000
£460 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Budget offering from LG delivers where it counts

Highs: Exceptional value; good design; connectivity and images
Lows: Black levels; restricted viewing angle; audio is average

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 3
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (and CI slot)

Tested: Issue 172
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/613314



SONY
37in → KDL-40W5500
£900 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Excellent LCD all-rounder

Highs: Impressive dynamic contrast and smooth motion; networking features
Lows: Styling is bland; AppliCast needs more content

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (and CI slot)

Tested: Issue 171
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/604105



TOSHIBA
42in → 42ZV555D
£900 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Much-touted Resolution+ LCD gives a polish to SD sources

Highs: HD performance; Resolution+ doesn't disappoint
Lows: Uninspired sound and design; no Res+ over HDMI

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (to 1080p24)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 3
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (& analogue & CI slot)

Tested: Issue 165
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/492878

Editor's Choice...

SAMSUNG
55in → LE55A956D
£2,800 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Samsung's monster-sized LED-backlit LCD picked up a Home Cinema Choice Best Buy award in #168, because in many ways it helped push liquid crystal to the forefront of TV tech. Our Labs measured its contrast ratio at over 200,000:1 with its Smart LED mode on; couple this with smooth 100Hz processing, class-leading connectivity and cutting-edge media streaming and you've got a flagship telly to fall in love with.

Tested: Issue 163
For price check visit: www.techradar.com/476857



→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (and CI slot)

Plasma TV

Best on test...



PIONEER
60in → KRP-600A
£5,000 Approx



Kuro with separate media box, Ethernet and satellite tuner

Highs: Awesome black levels; colour accuracy; slim panel; media-savvy

Lows: Problems with AVI files

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 3 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (plus CI slot and DVB-S2 tuner)

Tested: Issue 164

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/487206



PANASONIC
46in → TH-46PZ81
£1,600 Approx



Freesat-ready plasma is an early adopter's dream

Highs: Excellent definition and good contrast; strong audio, Freesat HD functions

Lows: Needs a dish for Freesat

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 3
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1 VGA
Digital tuner: Yes (plus Freesat tuner and CI slot)

Tested: Issue 157

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/363388



PANASONIC
50in → TX-P50V10B
£1,900 Approx



THX-certified, Viera Cast-touting NeoPDP

Highs: THX mode is stunning out of the box; good feature set

Lows: Unspectacular black level response; a bit chunky

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes (plus Freesat tuner and CI slot)

Tested: Issue 171

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/604030



PIONEER
50in → PDP-LX5090
£2,500 Approx



Baby brother of the LX6090 Kuro panel

Highs: Unbelievable contrast and black levels; superb detail

Lows: Speakers are an optional extra only

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 3
No. of Scart inputs: 3 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (plus CI slot)

Tested: Issue 159

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/417409



LG
32in → 32PG6000
£500 Approx



World's smallest 32in plasma challenges LCD rivals

Highs: Smooth movement; good blacks and connectivity

Lows: Lack of detail; some jagged edges; average audio

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes
1024 x 720 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes (plus analogue)

Tested: Issue 162

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/467207

Also Recommended...



LG
50in → 50PG6000
£1,100 Approx



Superb HD Ready plasma offering great value for money

Highs: Extensive calibration possibilities; excellent black level; sexy bezel

Lows: Not Full HD

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes
1366 x 768 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (plus CI slot)

Tested: Issue 154

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/241069



PANASONIC
37in → TH-37PX80
£650 Approx



Small PDP from Panasonic continues the Viera vibe

Highs: Beautiful blacks; natural colours; good GUI

Lows: HDMI v1.2 inputs lack DeepColor support

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes
1024 x 720 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 3 (v1.2)
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes

Tested: Issue 162

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/322863



SAMSUNG
50in → PS50A556
£1,000 Approx



Bargain-priced monster screen with a few caveats

Highs: Superb specification; great build quality; sharp detail

Lows: Some motion artefacts and noise visible

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 3
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes (plus CI slot)

Tested: Issue 161

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/463634

Editor's Choice...

PANASONIC
46in → TX-P46Z1
£4,300 Approx



THX certification, full 1080p wireless transmission, ultra-thin design...

Panasonic's flagship plasma TV is a giant leap forward for the display technology. Add in the Freesat HD tuner, Viera Cast and DLNA networkability and stunning HD and SD pictures and you begin to understand the premium price tag. Some might argue that its black levels aren't as jaw-dropping as a Pioneer Kuro – but those screens aren't being made any more. The Z1 is simply the best plasma TV you can buy.

Tested: Issue 172

For price check visit: www.techradar.com/613213

→ Specifications

HD Ready: yes (up to 1080p/24)
Native resolution: 1920 x 1080
No. of HDMI inputs: 4 (v1.3)
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes (and Freesat)





“.....without considerable knowledge or experience, high quality home cinema is not a suitable DIY activity”

LOOKING FOR A HOME

How easy is it to buy a home cinema system that suits you? You could read the magazine product reviews, find out who sells the recommendations, five-star favourites or best buys at the cheapest price and place your order. When the system is delivered to your door in the box, you get a friend who knows his onions to install it - and live happily ever after.

This is a fairly well-trodden path but it leads to dissatisfaction and a lot of wasted money. Besides there being a bewildering choice of components on the market today, there are also different ways in which components can be installed and connected together. Which sort of visual system do you go for? Projector and screen, plasma or LCD, an HD ready set or one with full 1080p capability? And on the audio side do you plump for a 5.1 or 7.1 speaker system, passive or active sub, and where do you site them for the best results? The choice of home cinema amp raises even more questions. Will you be listening to music through the same system? If so, you need an amp that approaches the performance of a decent 2-channel hi-fi amp, which is not that easy to find. Do you need SACD, DVD-Audio, or Blu-ray capability? How many inputs do you need for video, s-video, component, coaxial digital, optical digital and HDMI? The above are just a small percentage of the decisions that must be made. In short, it's complicated and very fertile ground for getting it wrong.

Achieving potential

To select a system, you could choose a collection of 'Best Buy' components in the hope that they will be a great combination. Maybe, but probably not. You could buy a pre-packaged all-in-one system from one manufacturer. This is almost certainly not the best route either as you will miss out on enormous potential. From informal surveys conducted, it appears highly likely that the majority of home cinema systems selected and installed on a DIY basis, that is without professional input, are performing at way below their optimum level. To compound matters, most are also ill-matched to the room in which they are installed and are, in reality, the wrong system. Without considerable knowledge or experience, high quality home cinema is not a suitable DIY activity.

Our aim must be to buy a home cinema system that will provide an excellent picture quality plus an audio delivery that will match, or even better, the commercial cinema experience. It must be exciting, reliable and deliver true value for money.

What and Where to buy

To ensure a home cinema system is right for you, where do you start? Here's an important tip ... **don't** start with **WHAT**, start with **WHERE**. There's only one way to give yourself the best chance of getting it right first time, and that's through a specialist AV dealer. It's possible you have preconceived ideas that put you off visiting one. Although you would welcome the advice and guidance, you don't know the technical jargon. You don't want to be talked down to. Your friend has said they only sell expensive gear and they're not interested if you don't have a big budget. They're expensive. These are just myths.

Most specialist AV dealers are running their business because, above all, home cinema is their hobby. They spend a large portion of their time comparing systems to get the best possible results. They know the component combinations which don't gel together and, conversely, they know the combinations which give the best performance within a given price range. Very importantly, they know how to get a system working to its optimum. But they all also know the system must suit you.





Listed on this page are 20 of the best AV shops in the country. They have been selected because they are known to do an excellent job in guiding customers towards home cinema systems that will provide years of superlative performance and total satisfaction.

STAR QUALITIES

VALUE FOR MONEY.....★ ★ ★ ★ ★

SERVICE.....★ ★ ★ ★ ★

FACILITIES.....★ ★ ★ ★ ★

VERDICT★ ★ ★ ★ ★

CINEMA SYSTEM?...

...ask the experts

Buying or being sold to?

There are dealers around, web based or otherwise, who will sell you anything you are willing to pay for. They may be a bit cheaper but that's all they offer. Now there's a group of long-established specialist dealers who are totally committed to putting the customer first. Their idea of 'selling' is to discuss your requirements, offer their advice, give you the best options, then play the systems for you and allow you to be the judge. You'll probably be surprised and, almost certainly, relieved to discover how easy it is to see and hear the differences between components and between systems. You'll be able to make a clear and informed decision about what to buy.

The story doesn't end there. These shops won't abandon you once you've put your hand in your pocket. They won't leave you to set up the system you've selected as best you can. They'll install it in your home, make sure it performs to its best, and ensure you're entirely happy with the way it works. Why? Because a high proportion of these dealers' custom comes through people who have bought from them before, either directly or by recommendation. It's vital to them to get it right for you.

Getting the best deal

Unless you've got money to burn, you'll be living with your new system for years. Most of these dealers offer much longer equipment guarantees than provided by the manufacturer, a very worthwhile benefit, but it also makes it in the dealer's interest to ensure high build quality and reliability. Maybe you could save a few pounds by buying piecemeal but you'll lose out on the overall package. As far as the dealers are concerned, they believe that taking care of their customers properly is a nicer way of doing business than just handing over boxes.

OUR TOP 20 UK SPECIALIST AV DEALERS

SOUTH

Ashford, Kent **SOUNDCRAFT HI-FI**

40 High Street.

01233 624441

Chelmsford **RAYLEIGH HI-FI**

216 Moulsham Street.

01245 265245

Colchester **RAYLEIGH HI-FI**

33 Sir Isaac's Walk.

01206 577682

Kingston-upon-Thames **INFIDELITY**

9 High Street, Hampton Wick.

020 8943 3530

Rayleigh, Essex **RAYLEIGH HI-FI**

44a High Street.

01268 779762

Custom Install Dept.

01268 776932

Southend-on-Sea **RAYLEIGH HI-FI**

132/4 London Road.

01702 435255

Tunbridge Wells **KENT HOME CINEMA**

69 London Road, Southborough.

01892 535007

Worthing **PHASE 3 HI-FI**

213-217 Tarring Road.

01903 245577

LONDON

N1 **GRAHAMS HI-FI**

190a New North Road.

020 7226 5500

SW11 **ORANGES & LEMONS**

61-63 Webbs Road, Battersea.

020 7924 2040

SOUTH WEST

Exeter **GULLIFORD**

97 Sidwell Street.

01392 491194

MIDLANDS

Birmingham **SOUND ACADEMY**

152a High Street, Bloxwich, Walsall.

01922 493499

Coventry **FRANK HARVEY HI-FI EXCELLENCE**

163 Spon Street.

024 7652 5200

Nottingham **CASTLE SOUND & VISION**

48/50 Maid Marian Way.

0115 9584404

Solihull **MUSIC MATTERS**

93-95 Hobs Moat Road.

0121 742 0254

NORTH

Chester **ACOUSTICA**

17 Hoole Road.

01244 344227

York **SOUND ORGANISATION**

2 Gillygate.

01904 627108

SCOTLAND

Edinburgh **LOUD & CLEAR**

Bonnington Mill, 72 Newhaven Rd.

0131 555 3963



The majority of the above dealers are members of one or both of the major trade organisations, BADA or CEDIA.



Blu-ray Players

Best on test...



PIONEER
Blu-ray → BDP-LX91
£1,800 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Reference status BD deck is also a first-rate CD and DVD player

Highs: Stunning picture; great sound; packed with features and well-designed

Lows: Precision Quartz Lock System works with CDs only

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: Yes, via Ethernet

Tested: Issue 167
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/532605



SONY
Blu-ray → BDP-S350
£250 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

'BD-Live Ready deck' still not quite the finished article

Highs: Good picture quality; decent sound; efficient DVD upscaling

Lows: Needs to be updated to BD-Live; DTS via bitstream only

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 1.1 (2.0 via upgrade)
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (stereo only)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/No
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: Yes, via Ethernet, USB

Tested: Issue 161
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/460426



LG
Blu-ray → BD370
£200 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Stylish deck with MKV talents and web features

Highs: Excellent Blu-ray performance; MKV playback is an unexpected bonus

Lows: Average DVD upscaling; no multichannel phono outs

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (stereo only)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: Yes, via Ethernet (including YouTube access), USB

Tested: Issue 170
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/596930



PANASONIC
Blu-ray → DMP-BD80
£350 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Flagship 2009 deck adds YouTube fun to top-class specs

Highs: Full multichannel outputs; superb, detailed images; net functionality

Lows: Uninspired design; sluggish loading times

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: Ethernet, VieraCast, SD card slot, USB 2.0

Tested: Issue 169
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/592252



SONY
Blu-ray → PlayStation3
£300 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

The original PS3 has passed the baton to its Slim sibling, but it's still a popular Blu-ray player

Highs: Profile 2.0 via firmware update; HD gaming, fast Java

Lows: It's yesterdays news

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: No/No
DVD-A/SACD playback: No/Yes* (*60GB version only)
Networkability: 6 USB, Ethernet, Memory stick, SD, wi-fi, Bluetooth

Tested: Issue 138
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/375076

Editor's Choice...

SONY
Blu-ray → BDP-S5000ES → £1,200 Approx

1 2 3 4 5



Sony has finally released a standalone Blu-ray deck that's comfortably better than its PlayStation 3 console. This £1,200 entry into the brand's Elevated Standard component range is a cinephile-grade machine with full Profile 2.0 support, internal decoding and bitstreaming of DTS-HD and Dolby TrueHD and best-in-class build quality. Pictures are immensely satisfying and its aural performance is exquisite. Well worth an audition if you're serious about BD.

Tested: Issue 166
For price check visit: www.techradar.com/503019

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No/No
Networkability: MicroVault card slot; LAN port

Also Recommended



SAMSUNG
Blu-ray → BD-P4600
£260 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Wall-mountable deck with wi-fi dongle option

Highs: Original styling; slim proportions; fast disc-loading; good multimedia management

Lows: Average DVD scaling; limited connectivity

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: No
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: Ethernet (wi-fi dongle is optional for an extra £50) USB

Tested: Issue 169
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/592233



YAMAHA
Blu-ray → BD-S2900
£700 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

High-end BD debut from Yamaha lacks HD decoding

Highs: BD picture; build quality; CD performance; fast loading

Lows: DVD playback only average; noisy; not Profile 2.0

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 1.1
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (5.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: No/No
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: SD card slot

Tested: Issue 162
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/467581



PIONEER
Blu-ray → LX-01BD
£2,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Designer all-in-one system with unique 12-sided omnidirectional 41. speaker system

Highs: Credible picture and surround sound; iconic styling

Lows: Speaker position takes work; no networking

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 1.1
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (but stereo only)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: NA/NA
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: No

Tested: Issue 169
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/592213

DVD Players

Best on test...



OPPO
DVD → DV-981HD
£180 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Excellent multiformat player with serious upscaling chipper

Highs: Excellent video processing; DVD-A and SACD playback; multiregion

Lows: Average pics from DivX files; online purchase only

→ Specifications

Upscaling: Up to 1080p
Multiregion: Yes
DVD A/SACD: Both
HDMI out: 1 (plus free cable)
Component: No
RGB Scart: 1
Onboard decoding: Dolby Digital, DTS
Other formats: CD, MP3, WMA, JPEG, MPEG-4, CD-R, CD-RW, DivX, DVD+R/-R, DVD+RW, DVD-RW

Tested: Issue 154
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/240790



PRIMAIRE
DVD → DVDi10
£1,750 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

High-end DVD deck with stereo amplifier and DAB/FM/AM radio

Highs: Superb build quality; top-notch picture and sound
Lows: No DivX, DVD-Audio or Super Audio CD support; confusing remote

→ Specifications

Upscaling: Up to 1080p
Multiregion: No
DVD A/SACD: No, oddly
HDMI out: 1
Component: 1
RGB Scart: 1
Onboard decoding: Dolby Digital, DTS
Other formats: CD, VCD, SVCD, CD-R, CD-RW, DVD-R, DVD+R, MP3, JPEG

Tested: Issue 173
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/620774



PIONEER
DVD → DV-LX50
£400 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

DVD component of Pioneer's LX range is a star performer

Highs: Fabulous build and styling; quality upscaled picture and audio performance
Lows: Complex onscreen display

→ Specifications

Upscaling: Up to 1080p
Multiregion: No
DVD A/SACD: Both
HDMI out: 1
Component: 1
RGB Scart: 1
Onboard decoding: Dolby Digital, DTS
Other formats: CD, MP3, WMA, JPEG, MPEG-4, CD-R, CD-RW, DivX, XviD, DVD+R/-R, DVD+RW, DVD-RW

Tested: Issue 156
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/248240



DENON
DVD → DVD-1940
£250 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Yet another quality upscaling deck from Denon

Highs: 1080p upscaling is tidy; SD performance is good too; wide format compatibility
Lows: Bland styling; stereo performance could be better

→ Specifications

Upscaling: Up to 1080p
Multiregion: No
DVD A/SACD: Both
HDMI out: 1
Component: 1
RGB Scart: 1
Onboard decoding: Dolby Digital, DTS
Other formats: CD, MP3, WMA, JPEG, MPEG-4, CD-R, CD-RW, DivX, DVD+R/-R, DVD+RW, DVD-RW

Tested: Issue 156
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/365528



CAMBRIDGE AUDIO
DVD → Azur 540D
£600 Approx (with amp)

1 2 3 4 5

Superb DVD partner for the brand's Azur amp range

Highs: Sturdy build quality married with smooth, colourful upscaled pictures
Lows: No hi-res audio playback or 1080p upscaling

→ Specifications

Upscaling: UP to 1080i
Multiregion: No
DVD A/SACD: No
HDMI out: 1
Component: 1
RGB Scart: 1
Onboard decoding: Dolby Digital, DTS
Other formats: CD, WMA, JPEG, MPEG-4, CD-R, CD-RW, DivX, DVD+R/-R, DVD+RW, DVD-RW

Tested: Issue 147
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/126088

Also Recommended...



ONKYO
DVD → DV-SP406
£100 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Quality upscaling at an affordable price

Highs: Picture quality mainly; front-mounted USB jack for multimedia playback

Lows: Bland looks and unimpressive build quality

→ Specifications

Upscaling: Up to 1080i
Multiregion: No
DVD A/SACD: No
HDMI out: 1
Component: 1
RGB Scart: 1
Onboard decoding: Dolby Digital, DTS
Other formats: CD, MP3, WMA, JPEG, MPEG-4, CD-R, CD-RW, DivX, DVD+R/-R, DVD+RW, DVD-RW

Tested: Issue 168
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/586445



ARCAM
DVD → DV-135
£900 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Universal deck that takes DVD as far as it can go. Nearly

Highs: 720p upscaling and CD performance
Lows: No multichannel output for SACD/DVD-A, no 1080p output mode

→ Specifications

Upscaling: Up to 1080i
Multiregion: No
DVD A/SACD: Both, stereo only
HDMI out: 1
Component: 1
RGB Scart: 1
Onboard decoding: Dolby Digital, DTS
Other formats: CD, MP3, WMA, JPEG, CD-R, CD-RW, DivX, HDCD, DVD+R/-R, DVD-RW, and DVD+RW

Tested: Issue 149
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/283946



LG
DVD → DVS450H
£100 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Stylish wall-mountable deck with USB and DivX HD support

Highs: Solid DVD playback; eye-catching design; DivX HD performance is startling
Lows: Can't be rack-mounted; not DTS decoding

→ Specifications

Upscaling: Up to 1080p
Multiregion: No
DVD A/SACD: No
HDMI out: 1
Component: 1
RGB Scart: No
Onboard decoding: Dolby Digital
Other formats: CD, MP3, JPEG, MPEG-4, MPEG-4 HD, CD-R, CD-RW, DivX, DivX HD, DVD+R/-R, DVD+/-RW

Tested: Issue 167
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/492983

Editor's Choice...

TOSHIBA
DVD → XDE-500 → £100 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Having crashed and burned with HD DVD, Toshiba fought back with this revolutionary upscaling DVD player. Powered by the brand's super-powered eXtended Detail Enhancement (XDE) technology, it breathes new life into standard DVDs – of which most of us have many. Build quality is a little lacking (reflecting the bargain price) but otherwise this is an easy product to recommend – with the brand's first BD player imminent, watch the price fall.

Tested: Issue 161
For price check visit: www.techradar.com/460536



→ Specifications

Upscaling: Up to 1080p
Multiregion: No, but hackable
DVD A/SACD: Nope
HDMI out: 1
Component: 1 (480/576 only)
RGB Scart: 1
Onboard decoding: Dolby Digital, DTS
Other formats: DVD-R/DVD-RW/CD/CD-R/CD-RW/CD, MP3, JPEG, DivX, XviD

AV Receivers

Best on test...



ARCAM
AVR → AVR600
£3,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Long-awaited HD AVR from classy Brit brand dazzles with movies and music

Highs: Sophisticated, flexible and polished sound; gorgeous design

Lows: Lacks a bit of grunt

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 120W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (DAB/AM/FM)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes, and 3
Serial port control: Yes, 2
THX certification: No
Component input: 5
HDMI: 5-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 172

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/613252



SONY
AVR → STR-DA5400ES
£1,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Class-leading mid-priced AVR with power and poise

Highs: Excellent build; audiophile SACD and CD playback; full of power

Lows: No Ethernet port, THX certification or DAB radio

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 120W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes
Serial port control: No
THX certification: No
Component input: 2
HDMI: 5-in, 1-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 166

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/503066



ONKYO
AVR → TX-SR607
£500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Mid-range HD receiver with Dolby 'Height' processing

Highs: Excellent OSD; lengthy feature set; twin subwoofer outputs

Lows: Dolby Pro Logic IIz is a bit of a gimmick

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 140W (6Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: Select2 Plus
Component input: 2
HDMI: 4-in, 1-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: No

Tested: Issue 170

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/596948



DENON
AVR → AVR-4310
£1,900 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Audyssey DSX-toting AVR will change the way you think about speaker placement

Highs: Awesome sound as standard; extra width and height channels are a boon

Lows: Lacks the 9.1 DSX option

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 130W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes, and 3
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: No
Component input: 3
HDMI: 6-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 173

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/623954



DENON
AVR → AVR-2309
£600 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Mid-range HD audio unit lacks networking but sounds superb

Highs: Fabulous balance with HD audio; punchy sound with CDs; powerful

Lows: No networking and only 1 HDMI output

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 100W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: No
Component input: 3
HDMI: 4-in, 1-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 162

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/466939

Editor's Choice...

PIONEER
AVR → SC-LX81
£1,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5



Derived from the brand's flagship Susano amp, but ultimately a more practical and affordable option, the £1,500 THX-certified and AIR Studios-graded Pioneer SC-LX81 receiver is built like a tank, styled like a supermodel and crammed with genius features (ICEpower technology, 9-band Advanced MCACC system, LAN interface and Advanced Sound Retriever to name a few). It sounds stunning, too, and our Tech Labs rated its power performance as excellent in all regards.

Tested: Issue 167

For price check visit: www.techradar.com/532595

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 140W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD: Yes/Yes
Zone 2: Yes and Zone 3
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: Yes – THX Ultra2 Plus
Component input: 3
HDMI: 4-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Also Recommended...



YAMAHA
AVR → RX-V3900
£1,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

7.1-channel mid-ranger lacks video networking and THX badge, but sounds fantastic

Highs: Dynamic, exciting sound; well-connected

Lows: Networked media player audio-only

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 140W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: No
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: No
Component input: 3
HDMI: 4-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 168

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/579879



ONKYO
AVR → TX-NR906
£1,400 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

THX Ultra2 Plus AVR with ISF tweakery is Onkyo's flagship

Highs: Powerful; superb video processor; full-on up front sound; networkability

Lows: Operational issues; build quality could be better

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 200W (6Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes and 3
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: Ultra2 Plus
Component input: 3
HDMI: 6-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 164

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com//476747



YAMAHA
Amp → DSP-Z7
£2,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Trimmed-down version of the award-winning Z11

Highs: Large sound with huge bass and plenty of detail

Lows: Orange display; disconcerting pops when changing sources

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 140W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: No (net only)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes, and 3 & 4
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: No
Component input: 3
HDMI: 5-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (5.1)

Tested: Issue 172

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/612358

Projectors

Best on test...



SIM2
DLP → Grand Cinema
C3X 1080
£23,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Reference-status PJ with brilliant colour management

Highs: Gorgeous design; small form factor; dazzling pictures

Lows: SD processing isn't quite hi-end enough for the price

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
PC compatibility: Yes (D-Sub)
Brightness (claimed): NA
Contrast (claimed): 10,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 2,000 hours
Fan noise: NA
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 169

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/591731



SONY
SXRD → VPL-VW80
£5,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Sony's SXRD technology continues to dazzle

Highs: Pictures are near faultless; features galore; runs quietly; sky high contrast ratio

Lows: Motion Enhancement system needs work

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
PC compatibility: Yes (D-Sub)
Brightness (claimed): 800 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 60,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 3,000 hours
Fan noise: 20dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 164

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/487460



JVC
D-ILA → HD350
£3,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Fantastically filmic PJ is a steal at £3,500

Highs: Stunning picture quality; runs quietly; easy and flexible to setup

Lows: No direct PC hookup; DLP rivals may be brighter

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
PC compatibility: Only by HDMI
Brightness (claimed): 1,000 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 30,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 2,000 hours
Fan noise: 19dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 167

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/532631



OPTOMA
DLP → Themescene HD82
£2,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

A tasty development of a distinguished product line

Highs: Good blacks levels; impressive colour performance; easy to set up

Lows: Some dynamic iris noise; some DLP rainbow effects

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2 x v1.3
Component inputs: 1
PC compatibility: Yes (D-Sub)
Brightness (claimed): 1,300 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 20,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 3,000 hours
Fan noise: 26dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 173

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/620868



PANASONIC
LCD → PT-AE3000
£2,200 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Excellent all-rounder packed with user-friendly features

Highs: Good black level, contrast and colours; flexibility; quiet running

Lows: Needs tweaking for best results; no 12V trigger

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 3
Component inputs: 2
PC compatibility: Yes (D-Sub)
Brightness (claimed): 1,600 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 60,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 2,000 hours
Fan noise: 22dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 166

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/503174

Also Recommended...



SONY
SXRD → HW10
£1,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Full HD at a great price from this entry-level Bravia

Highs: Superb film-like picture quality; excellent build; virtually no fan noise

Lows: On the large side; moderate lamp brightness

Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
PC compatibility: Yes (VGA)
Brightness (claimed): 1,000 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 30,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 2,000 hours (5,000 eco)
Fan noise: 22dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 163

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/460300



SANYO
LCD → PLV-Z3000
£2,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Solid HD performer with a few minor niggles

Highs: Flexible lens settings; quiet operation; tasty price

Lows: Lacks basic niceties like a 12V trigger and remote focus; black levels aren't best in class

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 2
PC compatibility: Yes (D-Sub)
Brightness (claimed): 1,600 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 65,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): N/A
Fan noise: 19dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 167

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/532622



VIVITEK
DLP → H9080FD
£10,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

The world's first 'lampless' LED projector

Highs: Excellent colour fidelity; great definition; long lifespan

Lows: Lacks brightness; early adopters pay for the innovative LED tech

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
PC compatibility: Only by HDMI
Brightness (claimed): 1,000 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 15,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 4,000 hours
Fan noise: NA
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 173

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/620783

Editor's Choice...

EPSON
LCD → EH-TW3800
£2,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5



Ideal for movies, sports, TV and gaming, Epson's high-value EH-TW3800 is a flawless example of cutting-edge 1080p LCD projection technology. Priced at £2,000, it offers a superb picture and boasts easy setup, high dynamic contrast ratio, great connectivity (including twin HDMI) and ISF calibration. It's deadly quiet in operation, and looks classy, too. Proof, if it were needed, that Epson knows a thing or two about making high-quality HD projectors. Those with bigger wallets might want to check out the step-up EH-TW5800 as well.

Tested: Issue 167

For price check visit: www.techradar.com/527031

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
PC compatibility: VGA
Brightness (claimed): 1,800 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 18,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 4,000 hours
Fan noise: 22dB
24fps: Yes

Subwoofers

Best on test...



BK
SW → XLS200
£290 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

10in driver married to high- and line-level inputs

Highs: Deep and extended output; disproportionately powerful; compact

Lows: Bland styling

→ Specifications

Frequency response: 22Hz-100Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 275W
Driver: 10in
Weight: 12.7kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: No
Remote control: No

Tested: Issue 151

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/249083



MARTINLOGAN
SW → Descent I
£3,250 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Weapons-grade unit with 3 x 10in woofers

Highs: Superb engineering; Reference standard performance

Lows: Bulky and premium-priced; no automated setup

→ Specifications

Frequency response: 18Hz-120Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 500W
Driver: 3 x 10in
Weight: 47.7kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: No
Remote control: No

Tested: Issue 167

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/532655



BOWERS & WILKINS
SW → ASW608
£300 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Compact subwoofer ideal for smaller rooms

Highs: Excellent grip and musical low-end control

Lows: Limited by its size

→ Specifications

Frequency response: 23Hz-140Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 200W
Driver: 8in
Weight: 8.85kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: Yes
Remote control: No

Tested: Issue 160

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/423217



VELODYNE
SW → DD-10
£1,900 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

We love the see-thru version of this excellent bass shifter

Highs: Thrilling performance, special edition finishes

Lows: You can get more muscle for the money

→ Specifications

Frequency response: 18-120Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 1,250W
Driver: 10in
Weight: 26kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: Yes
Remote control: Yes

Tested: Issue 158

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/381347



VELODYNE
SW → SPL-1200 Ultra
From £1,400 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Potent sub – now with custom finish options

Highs: Tight, powerful bass; useful auto-calibration

Lows: Few added benefits over the step-down model

→ Specifications

Frequency response: 21-120Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 1,200W
Driver: 12in
Weight: 22kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: Yes
Remote control: Yes

Tested: Issue 172

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/613234

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Speaker Systems

Best on test...



BOSTON ACOUSTICS
5.1 → VS Series
£5,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Gorgeous-looking, hi-tech 5.1 system for serious cinema

Highs: Enormous sound; scintillating HF performance
Lows: Subwoofer feels underpowered compared to surrounds

→ Specifications

Power handling: 2 x 400, 3 x 250W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 1 x 500W
Finish: Wood; Bookshelf: No

Tested: Issue 173

For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/623230



PIONEER
5.1 → EX Series
£11,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

A stunning 5.1 system to match the brand's high-quality components

Highs: Breathtaking accuracy; beautiful imagery and detail; sexy design and solid build
Lows: Demands specific room placement

→ Specifications

Power handling: 5 x 160W,
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 250W
Finish: Gloss; Bookshelf:
Rears (at a stretch...)

Tested: Issue 170

For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/597086



CABASSE
5.1 → EOLE 2
£1,200 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Quirky-looking 5.1 sub/sat system

Highs: Design and build; flexible mounting; warm, involving voice
Lows: Slightly rough high frequencies; power handling disappoints; limited bass

→ Specifications

Power handling: 5 x 70W,
4 x 100W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 250W
Finish: Gloss; Bookshelf: Yes

Tested: Issue 169

For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/591911



TEUFEL
5.1 → System 9
€4,400 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Potent THX Ultra2-system with industrial styling and build

Highs: Great bass extension; huge scale and accuracy; pleasing to look at, too
Lows: Stands or wall bracket fittings are extra; subwoofer is huuuuge!

→ Specifications

Power handling: 3 x 240W, 1 x 180W
Rears: Dipole
Subwoofer: 700W
Finish: Alu; Bookshelf: No

Tested: Issue 166

For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/502870



MISSION
5.1 → 79 Series
£2,400 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Floor-standing system with innovative side-firing bass drivers

Highs: Sophisticated and clean-sounding; excellent stereo imagery; easy on the eye
Lows: Not the most powerful or deepest bass in its class; won't go super-loud

→ Specifications

Power handling: 5 x 200W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 300W
Finish: Gloss; Bookshelf:
Rears only

Tested: Issue 171

For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/605119

Also Recommended...



JAMO
5.1 → A 102 HCS 5
£330 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Good-value 5.1 system with living-room-friendly size/looks

Highs: Relaxed, intelligible dialogue presentation; available online for as little as £200
Lows: Subwoofer lacks real subterranean power; small satellites lend a rawness to the audio

→ Specifications

Power handling: 5 x 60W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 200W
Finish: Cherry; Bookshelf: No

Tested: Issue 170

For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/597043



KEF
7.1 → Q Series
£2,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Classy-looking 7.1 set with a penchant for music and movies

Highs: Seamless integration from UniQ speakers; crystal clear high-end
Lows: Floorstanders need a lot of breathing space

→ Specifications

Power handling: 4 x 130W, 2 x 100W, 1 x 150
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 250 RMS
Finish: Wood; Bookshelf: No

Tested: Issue 166

For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/502987



MJ ACOUSTICS
5.1 → Xeno
£800 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Stylish 5.1 sub/sat system with remarkable voice

Highs: Compact design; strong centre channel; feisty, versatile subwoofer
Lows: Lacks the scale of dispersion required for larger rooms

→ Specifications

Power handling: 4 x 100W, 1 x 120W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 120W
Finish: Gloss; Bookshelf: Yes

Tested: Issue 161

For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/423010

Editor's Choice...

KEF
7.2 → Reference
£40,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

If we were planning a once-in-a-lifetime home cinema, we'd have this £40k KEF system on our list. Everything from the build quality and luxurious black finish to the 7.2 performance is awe-inspiring.

The array is underpinned by twin 1,000W, 18in subwoofers – and even the floorstanding L/R units tout three 10in drivers – but KEF's UniQ tweeter wizardry means high-frequency detail is captured and dispersed in all its glory. The Reference system is subtle, detailed, incredibly intricate and yet able to reproduce explosions with a visceral grip that pressurises your entire world. Musicality and mayhem all at once – and worth every penny.

Tested: Issue 165

For price check visit: www.techradar.com/496220

→ Specifications

Power handling: 3 x 150W, 4 x 100W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 2 x 1,000W (power from separate amp unit)
Finish: Gloss
Bookshelf: No

Essentials

Best on test...



LINKSYS
Media Server
NMH410 → £350 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

The poster boy of the new NAS generation

Highs: Beautifully built and whisper quiet; intelligent syncing with your PC
Lows: No integrated BitTorrent support; won't stream DRM-lashed content

→ Specifications

Drive Bays: 2 SATA (one pre-installed with 1TB HDD)
2 x USB ports
PC backup with NTI Shadow software
DLNA 1.5 certified

Tested: Issue 172
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/613297



LOGITECH
Remote control
Harmony 1100
£350 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Upgrade from the 1000 adds new software, GUI and layout

Highs: Massive, and expanding, online database of control codes; macro setup; user-friendly
Lows: RF control is only available as an extra

→ Specifications

3.5in colour touchscreen
Lithium-ion battery
Charging station
USB cable
Quick-start guide
AC adapter

Tested: Issue 168
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/586508



POPCORN HOUR
NAS media streamer
A-110 → £260 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

A flexible multimedia streamer with an online cult following...

Highs: Quiet in use; insanely versatile; extensive connections; HD streaming works well
Lows: Simple construction; inadequate manual

→ Specifications

256MB DDR SDRAM; 32MB Flash memory
NAS access: SMB, NFS, FTP
Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD audio passthrough
Extensive file support

Tested: Issue 169
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/592095



LACIE
HD media centre
La Cinema Black
Max → £390 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Sleek-looking media server with PVR functionality

Highs: Excellent AV performance; clear and intuitive menus; compatible with a huge range of media
Lows: Quite an expensive way to do what it does

→ Specifications

500GB HDD
1080i upscaling of SD movies
DVB-T tuner
MPEG-1, MPEG-2 / HD, MPEG-4, DIVX, XVID, H.264
HD, WMV9 HD video codec support

Tested: Issue 170
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/599128



LG
All-in-one-system → HT953TV
£700 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Mr Mark Levinson-tuned solution with 10.1 virtual surround

Highs: Elegant speaker design; HDMI input for Blu-ray; powerful 5.1 surround sound
Lows: Sounds a little compressed in stereo; cabinets are plastic

→ Specifications

1,000W claimed power output
Dolby 5.1, Pro-LogicII, DTS 5.1, ES decoders
USB Host
HDMI: 1 in, 1 out
1080p upscaling
FM tuner

Tested: Issue 163
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/476886

Also Recommended...



HAUPPAUGE
PVR → HD PVR
£150 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Back up your Sky+ HD box via component

Highs: Supplied with comprehensive software suite
Lows: No built-in storage; requires powerful PC

→ Specifications

USB: Yes – use this to hookup to your PC
Component, S-video, stereo and optical digital audio (use the latter for recording Dolby Digital 5.1)

Tested: Issue 165
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/490892



WYPLAY
Media player → Wyplayer
£430 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Twin-tuner PVR with networking nous

Highs: Incredibly flexible and powerful
Lows: Overdesigned GUI; annoying remote; pricey

→ Specifications

Twin digital tuners
HDMI output to 1080i
Optical audio output
Ethernet/wi-fi
500GB HDD
3 x USB 2.0 host
MPEG-1/2, MPEG-4 (AVC/H.264); WM9, XviD and DivX file support

Tested: Issue 174
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/618263



SHARKOON
Gaming Headphones
X-tatic → £110 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Dolby Digital 5.1 cans add another level to gaming

Highs: Creates truly immersive audio and a believable bubble of sound; comfortable to wear
Lows: No wireless option

→ Specifications

8 speakers (4 in each earpiece)
PS3, Xbox and Xbox 360 chat function
Sound control unit: 1 x optical input; 2 x analogue audio; 3 x analogue 3.5 mm audio outputs; DD 2.0, 5.1 and Pro-Logic decoders

Tested: Issue 169
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/592328

Editor's Choice...

IOMEGA
NAS storage
StorCenter IX2
£320

1 2 3 4 5

This diminutive 2TB NAS device from Iomega (with painless installation, two-disk RAID array, USB 2.0 ports and Bluetooth connectivity) makes PC backup and network media distribution a doddle. And it looks sexy, too.



Tested: Issue 167
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/532738

→ Specifications

2 TB capacity
Windows PC, Mac OS and Linux compatible
Two USB 2.0 ports (host, to connect external HDD or printers)
10/100/1000Mbps Ethernet connection

Top Five Blu-rays

Got a Blu-ray player? Then get these titles...

Children of Men Riveting sci-fi gets the HD release it deserves	1 2 3 4 5
Battlestar Galactica: Complete Series All the Cylon-fused adventures in one box	1 2 3 4 5
The Good, the Bad and the Weird Kray-zee Korean western on a cracking BD	1 2 3 4 5
Watchmen: Director's Cut Adult-friendly comix adaptation	1 2 3 4 5
Akira US import with mindblowing 24/192kHz TrueHD	1 2 3 4 5



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JVC DLA-HD750

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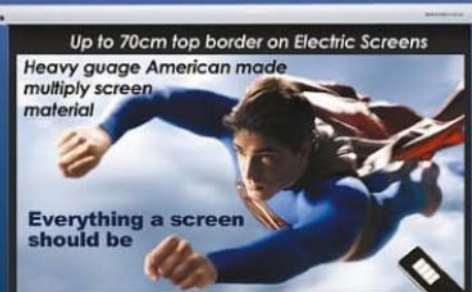
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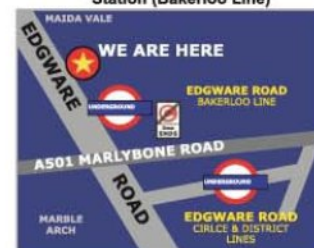
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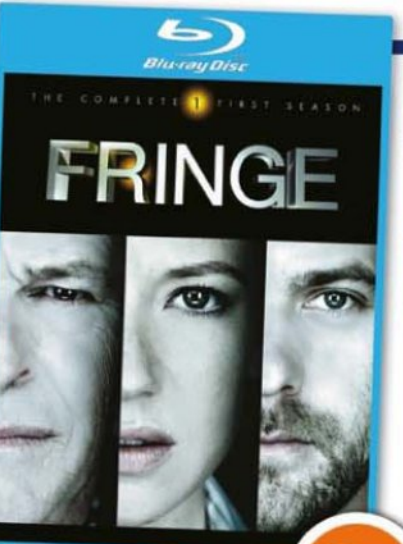
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